

— *The* —
WAY of
The **SEA**

NORMAN DUNCAN

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"And He set his right foot upon the sea and his left foot upon the earth and cried with a loud voice as when a lion roareth; and when he had cried seven thunders uttered their voices"

THE WAY OF THE SEA

BY
NORMAN DUNCAN



WITH A FOREWORD
By FRANK T. BULLEN

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1905.



To
The Memory of My Father,
R. A. D.

“*Ay, 'tis the way o' the Sea,*” said the Keeper of the Light. “*She struck on the Fangs, zur—them rocks t' the nor' east, where the waves is break-in'. That's where the sea cotched she—fair under the Fangs, zur ; an' she were lost with all hands—all hands. 'Twere a gale from the nor' east—a freezin' wind in the night, with the fog as thick as bags an' the sea in a wonderful tumble. Sure, we could see nothin' ; but we heered un scream—heered them poor men cry for help, zur. But what could us do in that blackness an' ragin' ? God, zur ! What could us do ? Ay, 'tis the way o' the Sea. The wind drove the schooner in, the fog covered up the light ; an' the breakers—sure, when the breakers cotched the ship in that trap, zur, 'twere an end on every mother's son, every child's fawther, aboard. That, zur, is the way o' the Sea !*”

FOREWORD

DESPITE the fact that we are the greatest maritime nation in the world, good sea-literature is so rare, so scarce among us, that any addition to our scanty stock ought to be sure of a very warm welcome. But unhappily the public taste has been so vitiated, by reading rubbish written about the sea, that a novel by some *ci-devant* sailor, and full of allusions to "seas running mountains high," transpontine pirates, and melodramatic mutinies, is far more likely to sell than the splendid work of such a giant among sea-writers as Joseph Conrad, or the wonderful piece of writing that lies before me. I have been greatly honoured by the request to write a Foreword to this book, but the invitation has made me feel exceedingly humble also.

It was in the pages of *McClure's Magazine* that I first became acquainted with the work of Mr. Norman Duncan. I have not the slightest notion who or what he is; but I am absolutely

FOREWORD

certain that with the exception of Mr. Joseph Conrad and Mr. Rudyard Kipling no writing about the sea has ever probed so deeply and so faithfully into its mysteries as his. The bitter brine, the unappeasable savagery of snarling sea and black-fanged rock bite into the soul, as acid eats into the engraver's plate, while one reads. But oh! the truth, the naked, gaunt truth of it all. You feel the corroding salt eating into the cracked hands, the blistering cold gripping the marrow, the silent endurance of ills unspeakable; and all for what? Such reward as in itself would to our soft ideas seem far below the standard of comfort offered by the worst of our prisons.

I know a little of that awful coast, and cannot think without a shudder of my brief experience. Yet when I read Mr. Duncan's *Fruits of Toil* the hot flush of shame rises for that I should for one moment consider that I had ever suffered at all.

There is another side to the book which is equally wonderful. It is of course the direct outcome of that stern never-ending fight with the merciless forces of Nature—I mean the religious side. From the awful elementary

FOREWORD

conflict ever being waged around, above, and beneath them, these brave, toil-toughened, ignorant souls have taken a theology fierce, hard, and cruel as the tempest-battered rocks upon which they so often gasp out their poor lives. Here is delineated with the hand of a master the Newfoundland fisherman's idea of the Lord God A'mighty, of a conventional and hardly to be won Heaven, of an ever-present, unspeakably horrible, and easily-to-be-obtained Hell. And it makes the heart bleed to find no mention in that stern creed of the fact that God is Love.

But I must not dare to intrude farther. The book is of the best in matter, manner, and fidelity to fact; and to say that I am proud and grateful thus to be associated with it is only to state the baldest truth.

FRANK T. BULLEN.

MELBOURN,

CAMBRIDGESHIRE,

March 4, 1904.



TO THE READER

The author is under obligation to the folk of the Newfoundland outports, who sheltered him, of whatever condition they were, and freely gave of the best that they had—in their larders, which, in far parts, were sometimes lean, and in their hearts, which never, anywhere, failed of an abundance of good things. He was never turned away from a door, whatever the time o' night, never denied a seat at the board, however low the store of food, never frowned upon, whatever the burden, whatever the offence.

The reader of "The Way of the Sea" will not be puzzled by strange words if he remember that a "tickle" is a narrow passage between two islands or to a harbour, that a "flake" is a broad platform upon which fish are sun-dried, that a "stage" is a small out-building, at the water-side, where the fish are split and salted. It may be well to inform him, too, perhaps, that "broose"

TO THE READER

is a toothsome dish resembling boiled hard-tack ; that " caplin " are bait-fish, which are not by any means despised as food, however, when there is nothing better to be had ; and that, finally, the " lop " is the sea raised by the wind, as distinguished from the ground -swell.

And with this the author commits the folk of the book to the heart of the reader, wherein, as he hopes, they may find place for a little while.

NORMAN DUNCAN.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I	PAGE
THE CHASE OF THE TIDE	1
CHAPTER II	
THE STRENGTH OF MEN	33
CHAPTER III	
THE RAGING OF THE SEA.	67
CHAPTER IV	
THE BREATH OF THE NORTH	97
CHAPTER V	
CONCERNING BILLY LUFF AND MASTER GOOD- CHILD	127

CONTENTS

CHAPTER VI	PAGE
THE LOVE OF THE MAID . . .	159
CHAPTER VII	
THE HEALER FROM FAR-AWAY COVE . .	187
CHAPTER VIII	
IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD . . .	217
CHAPTER IX	
A BEAT T' HARBOUR . . .	257
CHAPTER X	
THE FRUITS OF TOIL . . .	307

THE CHASE OF THE TIDE

Chapter I

THE CHASE OF THE TIDE

THE enviable achievement in his sight was a gunwale load snatched from a lippy sea ; he had never heard of a pirate or a clown or a motorman. From the beginning, he was committed to the toil of the sea ; for he was a Newfoundlander of the upper shore—the child of a grey, solemn waste-place : a land of artificial graveyards. The lean rocks to which the cottages of Ragged Harbour cling like barnacles lie, a thin, jagged strip, between a wilderness of scrawny shrubs and the sea's fretful expanse. Hence, inevitably, from generation to generation, the people of that barren match their strength against the might of tempestuous waters, fighting with their bare hands—great, knotty, sore, grimy hands ; match, also, their spirit against the invisible terrors which the sea's space harbours, in sunshine and

THE WAY OF THE SEA

mist, by all the superstition of her children. He had been brought forth and nurtured into hardy childhood—into brown, lithe, quick strength—no more for love than for the labour of his hands. Obviously, then, he was committed to the toil of the sea.

This was disclosed to him—this and the sea's enmity—while he was yet in a pinafore of a hard-tack sacking, months distant from his heritage of old homespun clothes.

"I 'low I cotches moare fish 'n Job Luff when I grows up," he boasted to Sammy Arnold, who had fished out of Ragged Harbour for sixty years, and was then past his labour. "I 'low I salts un better, too."

Sammy chuckled.

"I 'low," the child pursued, steadily, "I cotches moare'n you done, Uncle Sammy."

"Hut, b'y!" the old man cried in a rage. "They be moare quintals t' my name on Manuel's books 'n they be—'n they be—folk in the—the world!"

They were on Lookout Head, waiting for the fleet to beat in from a thickening night; from this

THE CHASE OF THE TIDE

vantage Uncle Sammy swept his staff over the land, north to south, to comprehend the whole world.

“Iss?” said Jo, doubtfully. It was past his understanding; so he crept to the edge of the cliff to watch the black waves roll ponderously out of the mist, and shatter and froth over the lower rocks.

“The say do be hungry for lives this even,” Uncle Sammy sighed.

“For me?” the boy screamed. “Is un?” He shrank from the abyss, quivering.

“He do be hungry this day.”

Jo strode forward, as in wrath; then boldly he faced the sea, bearding it, with clinched hands and dilated nostrils.

“’Tis good for un,” Uncle Sammy laughed.

“The say woan’t cotch me!” the boy cried. “I woan’t let un cotch me!”

“He’ve not cotched *me*,” Sammy said, serenely. He peered seaward; and for him it was as though the mist were the dust of past years.

“I woan’t let un cotch me!” the boy cried again. He stumbled, in blind fright, to Uncle

THE WAY OF THE SEA

Sammy, and took his hand. "I woan't!" he sobbed. "I woan't . . . I woan't!"

It was the Mystery! "Skipper Jo, b'y," the old man whispered, "you be one o' they poor folk that can't 'bide the say. Little Skipper," he said, crooking his arm about the lad's waist, "never care. Iss, sure—you be one o' they the say catches—like your fawther—iss, sure."

Thereafter Jo knew the sea for his enemy. But the perception was not always present with him; it was, indeed, to his spirit, like the eternal sound of the breakers to his senses—overshadowing, obscured, lost. For, as of course, in the years of idleness—numbering, from the suckling months, five—he had all the wisdom of children to glean and winnow and store; and that, in but small part, concerns many things—the ways of lobsters and tom cod, the subtle craft of dories, the topography of the wildernesses under broad flakes, the abiding places of star-fish and prickly sea-eggs, the significance of squid-squalls, and the virulence of squids. In the years that browned his face and yellowed his hair and brought him boots of goat-skin, a jew's harp, and a slicker, he had to learn

THE CHASE OF THE TIDE

of the activities of life much of a kind with this: In the morning—soon as the light spreads from the inland hills—men go out to fish, and, when they have fished many days, their wrists are swollen and festered, and the cracks in the palms of their hands are filled with hard, black blood; women never go out to fish, but, rather, stay ashore to milk goats, make boots, spin the sheep's wool, split wood, tend babies, spread the fish on the flakes, gather soil for the gardens, keep the stages clean, and cook potatoes and broose; children stand on tubs at the splitting table, to cut the throats of cod, and when, in the depths of night, they nod, through weariness, a man with a bushy white beard cries, "Hi, b'y! I'll heave a head at ye if ye fall asleep"—a cold, slimy, bloody cod head.

"They be a time comin'," was the burden of his thought in those days, "when I can't bide awake." So thinking, he would shudder.

Thence, to his tenth year, when all things were suddenly revealed, he wondered concerning many things; and chief among his perplexities was this: Where did the tide go? Where did the waters

THE WAY OF THE SEA

bide until they ran back through the tickle to cover again the slimy harbour bottom? It was a mocking mystery; ultimately, as shall be set down, it was like a lure to adventure cast by the sea. He wondered, also, what lay beyond the hills that rose, softly blue, far, far beyond the rocks where the bake-apples and juniper berries grew. The land was undiscovered; the wilderness between impenetrable. Who made God? God was uncreated, said the parson. That was incomprehensible. Did they use squid or caplin for bait in the storied harbour called New York? Heigh, oh! The stranger had gone. Where did the tide go? Day after day it slipped out and crept back: and as, returning, it gurgled over the bottom, it mocked him again; and, as it turned and stole away, it enticed him to follow—far as need be. Oh, well! How could flour grow on blades of grass, as the stranger had said? Again, the stranger had gone. Was a horse as big as two dogs put together—big as Bob and Bippo? Tom Jearce, who had seen a horse in Green Bay, was with Manuel's schooner on the Labrador. Nobody else knew. But where did the tide go? Where did the waters

THE CHASE OF THE TIDE

bide? That was the nearest mystery. Truth, it was like a scream in the night.

“Hut, b’y!” said Uncle Sammy. “They be a hape o’ curious things about the say. Sheer off from they. Iss, sure. The tide do goa in a hoale in the bottom.”

Jo had abandoned that theory months ago; and so he puzzled, until, one day, when he and Ezekiel idled together, the punt slipped, at the turn of the tide, from under the laden flake, where the shadows are deep and cold, into the fading sunshine of the open harbour. Her shadow wriggled to the dull, green depths where the starfish and sea-eggs lay; and the wary dories darted, flashing, into the security of the black waters beyond. She tugged at her painter like a dog at the leash—swinging fretfully, reaching, slacking with a petulant ripple; it was as though she panted to join the waters in the race through the tickle to the wide, free open. Now, the sea was here restrained from treacherous violence by encircling rocks; so, with rocking and ripple and amorous glitter, Jo was lured from the absent observation of a lost kid—which, bleating, picked

THE WAY OF THE SEA

its way up the cliff to a ragged patch of snow—to a deeper contemplation of the mystery that lay beyond the placid harbour. The sea's ripple and glitter and slow, mighty swell; her misty distances, expanse, and hidden places; the gulls, winging, free and swift, in her blue heights; the fresh, strong wind blowing—these are an enticement to the thoughts of men. They soothe all fear of the sea's changeful moods, excite strange dreams, wake soaring, fantastic longings; and to those who look and hearken comes the impulse, and hot on the heels of the impulse the deep resolve, and after the deep resolve the perilous venture. It was so with the boy in the shute of the punt, lying with his head on a slicker and his eyes staring vacantly through the tickle rocks to the glistening distance.

“Now, b’y,” Jo said, abruptly, “I knows!”

“Iss, b’y?” little Ezekiel answered from the bow.

“I ’low he heaps hisself up; an’ ’twill be like climbin’ a hill t’ paddle t’ the top.”

“Iss, b’y?” Ezekiel was patiently sure of Jo’s wisdom.

THE CHASE OF THE TIDE

"The tide—he do."

"They be nar a hill t' the say," Ezekiel cried with scorn.

"You be oan'y a lad," Jo persisted. "I 'low he heaps hisself up."

"Where do he?"

"T'other side o' the Grapplin' Hook grounds, where he've no bottom."

"'Tis barbarous far." Ezekiel regretfully glanced at the little schooner he had made. He had just rigged the jib with pains; he wanted to try the craft out in the light wind.

"'Tis not so far as the sun's hoale."

"Huh! 'Tis not so handy as Tailor's Nose."

Jo stirred himself. "Be your caplin spread, all spread on the flake t' dry, b'y?"

"Iss."

"Be un *all* spread, b'y?"

"Iss," plaintively.

"Us'll goa. Cast off!"

Ezekiel hesitated. "Be *your* caplin spread?" he demanded. Then, stern as a prophet, "God'll damn you t' everlastin' fire 'n you lie."

"You be cursin' God, Ezekiel Sevier!" Jo ex-

THE WAY OF THE SEA

claimed. "God'll damn *you*. 'Tis marked down this minute—iss, sure." With impatience, "Us'll goa. Cast off!"

Ezekiel loosed the painter and sprang to the rowing seat; and Jo bent his strength to the scull-oar, and sent the punt clear of a jutting rock. Now, in these parts the tide has a clutch; the water gripped the boat and drew her out—swift and sly as a thief's hand. Soon the grip was fast; had the young strength—that now spent itself in guiding, to escape wreck on the Pancake—been turned to flat resistance, it would have wasted itself in vain. The waters hurried, leaping, eddying, hissing; they tightened their grip as they ran past Aunt Phœbe's flake, where Aunt Phœbe herself was piling her fish, against the threat of rain over night—past the skipper's stage and net-horse, where the cod-trap was spread to dry in the sun, with a new and unaccountable rent exposed—past Jake Sevier's whitewashed cottage, set on a great rock at Broad Cove, where the pigs and chickens were amicably rioting with the babies in the kitchen. And the tide as it ran may here be likened to the hand of a woman on a victim's arm: to her winks

THE CHASE OF THE TIDE

and empty chatter as she leads him from a broad thoroughfare to an alley that is dark, whence a darker stair leads to a place where thieves and murderers wait; for the north wind was heaping up a bank of fog behind Mad Mull, which stretched far out into the sea, and would soon spread it the length of the coast below. But to the children's sight the sea was fair; so they were swept on, singing:

The fire bust out in Bonavist' Bay.

Fol de rol, fol de rol!

Where was the fish and the flake nex' day?

Fol de riddle rol, de-e-e-e!

An' 'tis Nick, bully Nick, Mister Nicholas;

An' 'tis Nick, Mister Nicholas, O!

An' 'tis Nick, Mister Nick, Skipper Nicholas;

An' 'tis Cap-tain Penny, heigh oh!

Who made the fish for the fire to eat?

Fol de rol, fol de rol!

Whose was the room what the fire sweep' neat?

Fol de riddle rol, de-e-e-e!

An' 'tis Nick, bully Nick, Mister Nicholas;

An' 'tis Nick, Mister Nicholas, O!

An' 'tis Nick, Mister Nick, Skipper Nicholas;

An' 'tis Cap—

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"Lookit!" Ezekiel exclaimed, pointing to the shore. He was scared to a whisper.

"'Tis Bob," Jo said. "Hark!"

Bob, a frowsy old dog with the name of a fish-thief, was in the shadow of a flake, howling and madly pawing the shingle.

"'Tis the sign o' death!" Jo gripped the gunwale.

The dog howled for the third time; then he slunk off down the road with his clog between his legs.

"Josiah Butts—'tis he, sure!" Ezekiel exclaimed.

"Noa; 'tis——"

"Iss; 'tis Josiah. He've handy t' five yards too much t' the spread o' his mains'l."

"'Tis Uncle Job Luff, b'y," Jo said, knowingly.

"I heered un curse God last even."

Ezekiel started. "What did un say, b'y?" he insinuated.

"I heerd un say——" Jo came to a full stop.

"Huh!" he went on, cunningly. "Think o' all the cursin' you ever heered."

"Noa!" Ezekiel said, quickly. "Sure 'tis a sin t' think o' cursin'."

THE CHASE OF THE TIDE

Jo grinned. Then, sadly, he said: "'Tis Uncle Job—iss, sure. Poor Aunt 'Melia Ann!"

Ezekiel mused. "I 'low 'tis Uncle Job," he agreed at last. "He've a rotten paddle to his punt."

Jo spread the sail, stretched himself in the stern, with his feet on the gunwales and a lazy hand on the scull-oar, and took up the song again:

An' 'tis Nick, bully Nick, Mister Nicholas ;

An' 'tis Nick, Mister Nicholas, O !

An' 'tis Nick, Mister Nick, Skipper Nicholas ;

An' 'tis Cap-tain Penny, heigh oh !

The sun was dropping swiftly, puffing himself up in his precipitate descent to the ragged black clouds that were mounting the sky, taking on a deepening, glowing crimson, the colour of flame in dense smoke. The woolly clouds in the east were flushed pink, mottled like a salmon's belly—a borrowed glory that, anon, fled, leaving a melancholy tint behind. Soon the whole heaven, from the crest of the black hills, far in the unknown inland, to the black horizon in the mysterious expanse beyond the Grappling Hook fishing-grounds, was aglow: splashes of pink and

THE WAY OF THE SEA

gray and blue, thin streaks of pale green, heaps of smoky black and of gold, glowing, and of purple and violets and fiery red. The coast, high and rugged, with a low line of frothy white, and a crest of stunted spruce sloping to the edge of the precipice, was changed from dull green and duller grey to blood-red and purple and black; but this glorious mantle was soon lifted. In the white line there was one black space, the harbour mouth, whence the tickle led to the basin; and that space was like a rat-hole. On either side, from the tip of Mad Mull to the limit of vision in the south, the coast rocks were like a wall, sheer, massive, scowling, with here and there, at the base, great shattered masses, over which the sea frothed. The boat was headed for the sun; it was slipping over a gentle lop in a light wind. The weird, flaring sky—its darkening colours—the expanse of dull, red water, upon which the little boat bobbed as upon an ocean of thick cod blood—the isolation and impending night: all awed the boys. Their singing gave way to heavy silence, long continued, and silence to the talk of twilight hours.

“Rede me a riddle,” said Ezekiel.

THE CHASE OF THE TIDE

The demand startled Jo. The great descending night oppressed him; and he had been thinking of the tide, now a cold, frowning mystery. He eased the sheet and scanned the sea ahead. The sea was flat; there was no hill to be seen. He sighed, and asked this riddle in a distracted way:

*“As I went up t’ London Bridge,
I met me brother Jan;
I cut off his head an’ sucked his blood,
An’ let his body stan’.”*

“Jewberry,” said Ezekiel with lack of interest, giving the local answer, which all lads knew.

“Uh-huh!” said Jo. Then, bethinking himself:

*“As I went up t’ London Bridge,
I saw a mighty wonder;
Twenty pots a-bilin’,
An’ no fire under.”*

It was a new riddle in Ragged Harbour! “Who give it you, b’y?” Ezekiel cried.

“Granny Sevier,” said Jo. “Iss, sure; when I took her some trouts. She do say she heered un when she were a maid. ’Tis a brook bubblin’.”

Ezekiel marvelled.

From the body of fog that lurked behind Mad

THE WAY OF THE SEA

Mull, there dammed in its course from the north, a thick, grey mass overflowed and settled to the surface of the sea. A cloud, high lying, attenuated, impenetrable, rounded the point and crept seaward with the deviated current of the wind, its outmost parts swerving to the south, advancing slowly, implacably. Along shore, hugging the surface, a second silent cloud, impenetrable also, and immense, swept over the face of the waters to the Rocks of the Three Poor Sisters. The light scud, detached from the main body and driven before it, obscured the breakers, which, hitherto, had been in sharp contrast with rock and sea; the body that dragged itself after absorbed the distinguishing colour altogether, and thereafter nothing remained to mark the place. I may write: It was as though the sea's ally were relentlessly about its business—the one division stealthfully intent on interposing its opacity between the punt and the lurid sky, which was now glowing like the embers of a conflagration; the other swiftly proceeding to give ambush to the breakers, and to hide the entrance to the harbour. Or, if you will, the fog was in the form of a gigantic hand, shaped like a claw, being

THE CHASE OF THE TIDE

passed cautiously over a table, to close on a careless fly.

“They be nar a hill t’ the say, b’y,” Ezekiel said, impatiently. He glanced apprehensively shoreward.

It had come to Jo that the abode of the tide was hidden of design—an infinite, terrible mystery. In the consciousness of presumption he quaked; but he gripped the scull-oar tighter and held the boat on her course for the sun.

“They be nar a hill ’tween here an’ the sun,” Ezekiel plained.

They were sailing over the Grappling Hook grounds; and, as far as sight carried, the greying sea was flat.

“Us’ll goa hoame, now, Jo,” Ezekiel pleaded. “’Twill be barbarous hard t’ find the goaats in the dark.”

“They do be a hill further out,” said Jo. “Keep a lookout, b’y.”

A rift in the clouds disclosed the sun as it sank—as it went out like a candle in a sudden draught. The arm of fog closed in on the boat; the shoreward cloud crept past the harbour and reached for

THE WAY OF THE SEA

Gull's Nest Point, a mile to the south, the last distinguishable landmark. The boys were silent for a long time. Ezekiel watched a whale at play to leeward; he wondered concerning his fate if it should mistake the punt for its young, as had happened to Uncle Sammy Arnold long ago, when there were more whales, and they were much, much bigger, as Uncle Sammy had said. Jo was sunk in the bitterness of realising failure; he saw nothing but a surface of water that was flat—flat as the splitting table.

“’Tis past the turn o’ the tide,” said Jo at last, like a man giving up hope.

“Iss, sure!” said Ezekiel, blithely. “Us’ll come about.”

“Us’ll come about,” said Jo.

The theory had failed. Jo headed the boat for shore. He shaped the course by Gull’s Nest Point, measuring the shore from its fading outline to the probable location of the harbour; then he noted the direction of the wind, feeling it with his ear, his cheek, and the tip of his nose: fixing it, thus, in his mind. When he looked to Gull’s Nest Point again, the black mass had vanished

THE CHASE OF THE TIDE

“ Job Luff do say,” said Ezekiel, “ that the tide bides in a hoale in the say.”

“ Noa!” said Jo, sharply.

“ I ’low,” Ezekiel said with some deference, “ he’ve a hoale t’ goa to.”

“ Noa, b’y!” Jo exclaimed, fretfully.

“ I ’low he do,” Ezekiel persisted with deepening politeness.

“ Huh!” said Jo. “ What ’ud come o’ the fires o’ hell?”

“ Iss, sure, b’y,” Ezekiel said in awe. “ The tide ’ud put un out.”

“ Put un out,” Jo echoed, sagely.

Ezekiel accounted for the heresy of Job Luff’s theory thus: “ Huh! Job Luff do be Seven Days Adventist. Hell be for un—iss, sure.”

The fog thickened. Night came on, an untimely dusk. Fog and night, coalescing, reduced the circumference of things material to a yet narrowing circle of black water. The feel of the fog was like the touch of a cold, wet hand in the dark. The night was heavy; it was, to the confusion of sense, *falling*; it seemed to have been strangely vested with the properties of density and weight;

THE WAY OF THE SEA

it was, in truth, like a great pall descending, oppressing, stifling. Here is an awesome mystery; for the night has no substance; the mist, also, is impalpable! The fog, like the dark, is a hiding-place for shadowy terrors; it covers up familiar places—headlands and hills and coves and starry heavens—and secludes, in known vacancy, all the fantastic monsters that enter into and possess the imaginings of children in lonely times. Ezekiel, cowering in the bow, searched the mist for ghostly dangers—for one, a gigantic lobster, with claws long as a schooner's spars and eyes like the Shag Rock light. But Jo had no time for terror; he was fighting a fight that was already old, of which the history was written on the hand on the steering oar—a hand too small to span the butt, but misshapen, black at the knuckles, calloused in the palms, with the blood of cod congealed under the nails, and festering salt-water sores on the wrist. Time for visions of frothing lobsters? Joe had none. He was true son of that shore, and he had the oar and the sheet in his hands.

“Thick's bags,” Jo remarked, alluding to the fog.

THE CHASE OF THE TIDE

Ezekiel was silent.

Jo was steering by the wind; but the wind veered, scarce perceptibly, and the boy did not perceive the change at all. A crafty enemy! Thus was his childish inexperience turned against him. He had laid his course cunningly for the harbour before Gull's Nest Point had been wiped out; the course was now to the north by half a mile. With the deviation and drift he would meet the coast at the Rocks of the Three Poor Sisters, where his father had struck in a blizzard years ago. The boy planned to take the punt within sound of the surf, then to ship the sail and creep along shore to the harbour. That was the one way; but it was a perilous way, for the surf, being hidden, and sounding near at hand, has no location. Its noise rises and subsides through long distances; its strength is here, there, elsewhere, everywhere, nowhere; it is elusive, confusing as a great noise. The surf also has a clutch; a foot beyond its grasp and it is to be laughed at; an inch within its eager fingers and it is irresistible. The breakers of the Rocks of the Three Poor Sisters are like long arms—their reach is great; their strength and depth

THE WAY OF THE SEA

and leap are great. There was no peril in the choppy sea over which the boat was now pushing; the peril was in the breakers. Watchfulness could evade it; but with every boat's length of progress Jo was plunged in deeper wonder. He was evolving a new theory of the tide, which was a subtle distraction. Was the spell of this mystery to undo him? Thus Jo; as for Ezekiel, he was afraid of the monsters he had conjured up in the mist, so—as his people invariably do in dread and danger—he turned to his religion for consolation. He thought deeply of hell.

“Is you been good the day, b’y?” Ezekiel asked, dreamily.

“Noa,” Jo answered, indifferently. “I ’low I hasn’t spread me caplin quite—quite straight.”

The wind was stirring itself in the north. The dusk was thick and clammy. The sound of the surf had risen to a deep, harsh growl.

“Be you ’feared o’ hell?”

“Noa,” said Jo. “Lads doan’t goa t’ hell.”

Momentarily Ezekiel thought himself in the company of the damned. He looked in new fright at the water, through which, his experience had

THE CHASE OF THE TIDE

taught him, most men found their exit from life.

“ ’Tis a sin,” he cried, “ t’ say it ! ”

“ Sure, o’ such be the kingdom o’ heaven,” said Jo, in continued serenity, maintaining his position with the word of the Book.

“ Iss, sure ! ” Ezekiel was comforted.

The breakers seemed very near. Jo peered long into the tumultuous darkness ahead. Soon they could hear the hiss of broken waves. Jo freed the sheet and sprang for the mast. They furled the sail and stowed the mast. Jo took his place in the shute; he propelled the boat by the scull. Then Ezekiel’s sight did not reach seven oar-lengths from the bow.

“ Be you sure——”

“ You be not goain’ t’ hell, Ezekiel Sevier ! ” Jo exclaimed, lifting his voice above the sound of the surf. “ Doan’t worry me.”

The boat was advancing slowly, for the strength in the oar was slight. They were secure for the time, and they were not unused to the predicament; but at such other times the oar had been in larger hands, the lookout kept by more discerning eyes.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

They thought the harbour tickle was ahead, perchance some fathoms to the south or to the north. The wind had confused them utterly; the breakers were not the breakers of the Pillar and the Staff, but of the Rocks of the Three Poor Sisters. But they were not perturbed, so they fell again into thought and long silence; and for Jo thought was the old, disquieting wonder.

“Ezekiel!” Jo’s voice was husky, solemn; it had the thrill of triumph in it.

“Iss, b’y? Does you see the shoare?”

“*Ezekiel!*” Jo was exultant, like an investigator who beholds in wonder the beautiful issue of his research.

“Iss?”

Jo swung from side to side on the oar with a vigour stimulated by his exultation.

“I knows—iss, sure,” said he.

“Where the tickle be? Does you?”

“Where the tide goas.”

“Where do un goa?” Ezekiel asked, in mournful disappointment.

Jo pointed to the wash in the bottom of the boat as it slipped from stem to stern with the risen lop.

THE CHASE OF THE TIDE

Now the waters covered the boy's feet and gurgled and hissed under the stern-seat; now they swirled to Ezekiel's boots, sweeping along a chip and a spare thole-pin. Now the stern looked like the harbour basin at flood-tide; then the water receded, disclosing rusty nail-heads, which may be likened to the uncovered rocks, and a brown, slimy, accumulation, which may be likened to sea-weed and ooze.

"'Tis like the tide—'tis like un," Jo whispered.

The eyes of both boys were intent on the bottom of the punt, straining through the dusk. Jo still swung from side to side on the oar, an animate machine.

"Aye, b'y, sure," said Ezekiel.

"I found un out meself," Jo went on, solemnly. "I c'n tell Job Luff, now. He thought un were a hoale." Jo laughed softly. "'Tis noa hoale. 'Tis noa hill. 'Tis like *that*."

Ezekiel watched the water ebb and flow. Jo watched the water ebb and flow. Both were in the grip of the mystery—of the great solution which had been yielded to them of all the world.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"When 'tis ebb in Ragged Harbour," said Jo,
" 'tis the flood in—in—other pairts."

The discovery had fascinated their attention.
Lookout and headway were forgotten.

"Where, b'y?" said Ezekiel.

"Pa'tridge P'int," Jo answered, readily.
"What you sees from the Lookout in a fine
time."

"It do be too handy; it——"

"Twillingate, then, I 'low," said Jo. "Where
Manuel's trader comes from. 'Tis further'n any
place."

Ezekiel turned to resume the lookout. Jo
gloated in a long, low chuckle.

"Port! Keep un off!" The ring of terror
was in the scream. "Port! Port!"

"Aye b'y," firmly spoken.

Ezekiel rose in the bow and raised his hands as
though to push the boat back from a dang

"Port! Port!"

"Aye, b'y."

The Rock of the Third Poor Sister took black,
towering form in the mist, before and overhead.
The punt paused on the crest of a declivity of

THE CHASE OF THE TIDE

rushing water. The white depths were like an abyss; she was like a man clinging to the fringe of a precipice. It was a time for the strength of men; in that swift pause the strength of a child's arms was as no strength.

"The sea've cotched us!" Jo muttered. "The sea—he've cotched us!"

The wave ran its course, broke with slow might, fell with a crash and a long, thick hiss.

Ezekiel sank to the seat and covered his eyes with his hands, but Jo dropped the oar, and bearded the rock and the wave as he had done in the days when he wore a pinafore of hard-tack sacking, and he clinched his hands, and his nostrils quivered.

"The sea—he've cotched me," he said again; and it was like a quiet admission of defeat at the hands of a long-fought enemy.

The returning body of water slipped like oil under the boat; it fastened its grip at the turn, lifted the boat, lost it, caught it again, swept it with full force onward and downward.

"Mother!"

Ezekiel had forgotten his God. He cried for

THE WAY OF THE SEA

his mother, who was real and nearer. God had been to him like a frowning shape in the mist.

How shall we interpret? Where is the poet who shall now sing the Sea's song of triumph? Who shall ascribe glory to her for this deed? Thus, in truth, she bears herself in the dark corners of the earth. These children had followed the lure of her mystery, which is, to the people of bleak coasts, like the variable light in false eyes, like a fair finger beckoning. It was as though the Sea had smiled at their coming, and had said to the mist and the wind, "Gather them in." Neither strength nor understanding had been opposed to her treacherous might. They had been overwhelmed. Was there honour in this triumph? In the wreckage and little bodies that the waves flung against the rocks for a day and a night, lifting them, tossing them? In the choked lungs? In the bruised faces? In the broken spine? In the ripped cheek? In the torn scalp? In the glazed blue eyes? The triumph was cruel as vanity; or, if it were not of the pride of strength, such as is manifest in an infant spit on a lifted

THE CHASE OF THE TIDE

spear, but, rather, of greed, it was wanton as gluttony. If there be glory to the Sea, it was glory of hidden mercy; indeed, isolation and toil are things to escape. But if there be no glory, whose is the reproach? Thine, O Sea!

THE STRENGTH OF MEN

Chapter II

THE STRENGTH OF MEN

IT may be that there comes a time in the life of the Newfoundlander when chance flings him into the very vortex of the unleashed, swirling passions of wind, night, and the sea. That event, to be sure, never disturbs the course of the pallid days of the city men, the fellows with muscles of dough and desires all fed fat, who, as it were, wrap the fruits of toil in pink paper, tie the package with a pretty string and pass it over the colony's counter. It comes only to the brawny, dogged men of the coast, to whom cod and salmon and seal-fat are the spoils of grim battles. In that hour, it is to be said, being of a sudden torn from the marvellous contrivance of hewn wood and iron and rope and canvas, called a boat, with which the ingenuity of all past generations has equipped him, the Newfoundlander pits his naked strength against the sea: and that fight comes, to most men, at the end of life, for

THE WAY OF THE SEA

few survive it. Most men, too, have to face this supreme trial of brute strength in the season when they go to hunt the hair-seal which drift out of the north with the ice to whelp—but that is an empty phrase; rather, let it be said that it may be set down in significant terms, when, each with the lust of sixty dollars in his heart, they put forth into the heaving, wind-lashed waste of ice and dusk and black, cold seas, where all the hungry forces of the north are loosed as for ravage. It came upon Saul Nash, of Ragged Harbour, this fight did, when in temperate lands mellow winds were teasing the first shy blossoms in the woods and peopled places were all yellow and a-tinkle and lazy.

At break of day—a sullen dawn which the sky's weight of waving black cloud had balked for an hour—the schooner was still fast in the grip of the floe and driving sou'west with the gale. Then the thin light, flowing through a rent at the horizon, spread itself over a sea all dull white and heaving—an expanse of ice, shattered and ground to bits, fragments of immeasurable fields, close packed, which rose and fell with the labouring waves. There

THE STRENGTH OF MEN

was a confusion of savage noises, each proceeding from the fury and dire stress of conflict; for, aloft, where every shivering rope and spar opposed the will of the wind, the gale howled its wrath as it split and swept on, and, below decks, the timbers, though thrice braced for the voyage, cried out under the pressure and cruel grinding of the ice; but these were as a whimper to a full-lunged scream in the sum of uproar—it was the rending and crashing and crunching of the wind-driven floe, this thing of mass immense, plunging on, as under the whip of a master, which filled all the vast world with noise. The light increased; it disclosed the faces of men to men—frozen cheeks, steaming mouths, beards weighted with icicles, eyes flaring in dark pits. It disclosed the decks, where a litter of gaffs and clubs and ropes' ends lay frozen in the blood and fat of slain seal, the grimy deck-house and galley, the wrecked bowsprit, the abandoned wheel, the rigging and spars all sheathed with ice; and, beyond, as it pushed its way into the uttermost shadows, the solid shape of Deadly Rock and the Blueblack Shoal lying in the path of the wind.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

“Does you see un, men?” said the skipper.

They were seven old hands who had gathered with the skipper by the windlass to wait for the morning, and they had been on the watch the night long—big, thick-chested fellows, heavy with muscles and bones—most with forbidding, leathery faces, which were not unused, however, at other times, to the play of a fine simplicity—men of knotty oak, with that look of strength, from the ground up, which some gnarled old tree has; and they were all clothed in skin boots and caps, and some coarse, home-made stuff, the last in a way so thick and bulky that it made giants of them.

“Does you see un—the Blueblack—dead ahead?” the skipper bawled, for the confusion of ice and wind had overwhelmed his voice.

They followed the direction of his arm, from the tip of his frozen mit to the nearing shoal, dead ahead, where the sea was grinding the ice to slush. Death, to be died in that place, it might be, confronted them; but they said nothing. Yet they were not callous—every man loved his life; each had a fine regard for its duties and delights. But the schooner was in the grip of the pack, which

THE STRENGTH OF MEN

the wind, not their will, controlled. There was nothing to be done—no call upon strength or understanding. Why talk? So they waited to see what the wind would do with the pack.

“Well, men,” the skipper drawled, at last, “she’ll wreck. Seems that way t’ me—it do.”

“Eh, b’y?” ol’ Bill Anderson shouted, putting one hand to his ear and taking a new grip with the other, to keep his old hulk upright against the wind.

“She’ll wreck,” the skipper shouted.

“Iss,” said ol’ Bill, “she’ll wreck.” A pitch of the ship staggered him. When he had recovered his balance, he added, in a hoarse roar: “She’ll strike well inside the easter’ edge o’ the shoal.”

Thereupon there was a flash of discussion. The precise point—that was a problem having to do with the things of their calling: it was interesting.

“Noa, noa, b’y,” said a young man, who had lurched up. “She’ll strike handy t’ the big rock west o’ that by a good bit.”

“Is you sure?” retorted ol’ Bill, with a curl of the lip so quick that the pendant icicles rattled. “Ben’t it Ezra North I hears a-talkin’ agin?”

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"Iss, 'tis he," North growled.

"Tell me, b'y," Anderson shouted, "has you ever been wrecked at the ice?"

"I 'low I were wrecked twice in White Bay in the fall gales, an' 'tis so bad—" A blast of wind swept the rest of the sentence out of hearing.

"At the ice, b'y, I says," ol' Bill cried. "Has you ever been wrecked *here*?"

Some fathoms off the starboard-bow a great pan of ice lifted itself out of the pack, as though seeking to relieve itself of a pressure no longer to be endured. It broke, fell with a crash, and crumbled. North's sulky negative was lost in the clap and rumble of its breaking.

"Has you ever been caught in the pack afore?" ol' Bill pursued.

"You knows I hasn't," North snapped, in a lull of the gale.

"Huh!" ol' Bill snorted. "You'll know moare about packs nex' spring, me b'y. I—*me*, b'y—I been swilin' (sealing) in these seas every spring for fifty-seven years. An' I says she'll strike inside the easter' edge o' the shoal a bit. Now, what says you?"

THE STRENGTH OF MEN

North said nothing, but he looked for support to Saul Nash, who was braced against the foremast—a hairy man of some forty-odd years, with great jaws, deep-set eyes, and drawn, shaggy brows; mighty in frame and brawn, true enough, but somewhat less than any there in stature.

“Maybe she will,” said he, “an’ maybe she woan’t. ’Tis like us’ll find out for sure.”

“’Twill prove me right when us do,” said young North.

“’Tis not so sure,” Nash returned. “’Tis like she’ll strike where you says she will, an’ ’tis like she woan’t, but ’tis moare like she woan’t. But wait, b’y—bide easy. ’Twill not be long afore us knows.”

“Oh, *I* knows where,” said North.

But in half an hour he slunk aft, ashamed: for it was beyond dispute that she would strike where the old sealer had said. The shoal lay dead ahead in the path of the schooner’s drift. In every part of it waves shook themselves free of ice and leaped high into the wind—all white and frothy against the sky, which was of the drear color of lead. Its tons were lifted and cast down—smashed—

THE WAY OF THE SEA

crunched: great pans were turned to finest fragments with crashing and groaning and hissing. The rocks stuck out of the sea like iron teeth. They were as nothing before the momentum of the pack—no hindrance to its slow, heavy onrush. The ice scraped over and between them, and, with the help of the waves, they ground it up in the passage. The shoal was like some gigantic machine. It was fed by the wind, which drove the pack; it was big as the wind is big. Massive chunks came through in slush. The schooner may be likened to an egg-shell thrown by chance into the feeding-shute of a crusher. The strength of the shoal was infinitely greater than her strength. Here, then, as it appeared, was a brutal tragedy—a dull, unprofitable, sickening sight, the impending denouement inevitable and all obvious. The seal hunters of Ragged Harbour, mere sentient motes, hither driven by the wind of need, were caught in the swirl of the sea's forces, which are insensate and uncontrolled. For the moment, it was past the time when sinew and courage are factors in the situation.

“Sure, men,” said the skipper, “’tis barb’rous

THE STRENGTH OF MEN

hard t' lose the schooner—*barb'rous hard t' lose her*," he bawled, with a glance about and a shake of the head.

He looked her over from stem to stern—along her shapely rail, and aloft, over the detail of her rigging. His glance lingered here and there—lingered wistfully. She was his life's achievement: he had builded her.

"Iss, skipper, sir—sure 'tis," said Saul Nash. He lurched to the skipper's side and put a hand on his shoulder.

"'Twere a good v'yage, skipper," ol' Bill Anderson said, lifting his voice above the noise of the pack.

"'Twere a gran' haul off the Grey Islands—now, 'twere," said the skipper.

"'Twere so good as ever I knowed from a schooner," said Anderson.

"I hates t' lose them pelts," said the skipper. "I *do* hate t' lose them pelts."

"Never yet were I wrecked with bloody decks," said Anderson, "that I didn't say 'twas a pity t' lose the cargo. Never, b'y—never! I says every time, says I, 'twas a pity t' lose the pelts."

THE WAY OF THE SEA

Just then Saul's young brother John approached the group and stood to listen. He was a slight, brown-eyed boy, having the flush of health, true, and a conspicuous grace, but dark eyes instead of blue ones, and small measure of the bone and hard flesh of his mates. Saul moved under the foremast shrouds and beckoned him over.

"John, b'y," the man said, in a tender whisper, leaning over, "keep alongside o' me when—when—Come," bursting into forced heartiness, "there's a good lad, now; keep alongside o' me."

John caught his breath. "Iss, Saul," he whispered. Then he had to moisten his lips. "Iss, I will," he added, quite steadily.

"John!" in a low, inspiring cry.

"Saul!"

The swift, upward glance—the quivering glance, darting from the depths, which touched Saul's bold blue eyes for a flash and shifted to the dull sky—betrayed the boy again. He was one of those poor, dreamful folk who fear the sea. It may be that Saul loved him for that—for that strange difference.

"Close alongside, John, b'y," Saul mumbled,

THE STRENGTH OF MEN

touching the lad on the shoulder, but not daring to look in his face. “*Close—close alongside o’ me.*”

“Iss, Saul.”

It began to snow: not in feathery flakes, silent and soft, but the whizzing dust of flakes, which eddied and ran with the wind in blasts that stung. The snow came sweeping from the northeast in a thick, grey cloud. It engulfed the ship. The writhing ice round about and the shoal were soon covered up and hidden. Eyes were no longer of any use in the watching: but the skipper’s ears told him, from moment to moment, that the shoal was nearer than it had been. Most of the crew went below to get warm while there was yet time—that they might *be* warm, warm and supple, in the crisis. Also they ate their fill of pork and biscuit and drank their fill of water; being wise in the ways of the ice, each stuffed his stomach, which they call, at such times with grim humour, the long-pocket. Some took off their jackets to give their arms freer play in the coming fight, some tightened their belts, some filled their pockets with the things they loved most: all made ready. Then

THE WAY OF THE SEA

they sat down to wait; and the waiting, in that sweltering, pitching hole, with its shadows and flickering light, was voiceless and fidgety. It was the brewing time of panic. In the words of the Newfoundlander, it would soon be every man for his life—that dread hour when, by the accepted creed of that coast, earth is in mercy curtained from heaven and the impassive angel's book is closed. At such times, escape is for the strong: the weak ask for no help; they are thrust aside; they find no hand stretched out. Compassion, and all the other kin of love, being overborne in the tumult, flee the hearts of men: there remains but the brute greed of life—*more life*. Every man for his own life—for his *life*. Each watched the other as though that other sought to wrest some advantage from him. Such was the temper of the men, then, that when the skipper roared for all hands there was a rush for the ladder and a scuffle for place at the foot of it.

“Men,” the skipper bawled, when the crew had huddled amidships, cowering from the wind, “the ship'll strike the Blueblack inside o' thirty minutes. 'Tis every man for his life.”

THE STRENGTH OF MEN

The old man was up on the port-rail with the snow curling about him. He had a grip of the mainmast shrouds to stay himself against the wind and the lunging of the ship. The thud and swish of waves falling back and the din of grinding ice broke from the depths of the snow over the bow—from some place near and hidden—and the gale was roaring past. The men crowded closer to hear him.

“ ’Tis time t’ take t’ the ice,” he cried.

“ Iss, skipper!”

“ Sure, sir!”

Young John Nash was in the shelter of Saul’s great body: he was touching the skirt of the man’s great-coat—like a child in a crowd. He looked from the skipper’s face, which was hard set, and from the deck, which was known to him, to the waste of pitching ice and to the cloudy wall of snow which shut it in. Then he laid hold of a fold in the coat, which he had but touched before, and he crept a little closer.

“ Is you all here?” the skipper went on. He ran his eye over them to count them. No man looked around for his friends. “ Thirty-three.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

All right! Men, you'll follow Saul Nash. When you gets a hundred yards off the ship you'll drift clear o' the shoal. Now, over the side, all hands!" In a lull of the wind the shoal seemed suddenly very near. "Lively, men! *Lively!*"

The schooner was low with her weight of seal-fat. It was but a short leap to the pack in which she was caught—at most, but a swinging drop from the rail. That was all; even so, as the crew went over the side the shadow of the great terror fell—fell as from a cloud approaching. There was a rush to be clear of this doomed thing of wood—to be first in the way of escape, though the end of the untravelled path was a shadow: so there was a crowding at the rail, an outcry, a snarl, and the sound of a blow. The note of human frenzy was struck—a clangourous note, breaking harshly even into the mighty rage of things overhead and roundabout; and it clanged again, in a threat and a death-cry, as the men gained footing on the pack and pushed out from the schooner in the wake of Saul Nash. The ice, as I have said, was no more than a crust of incohesive fragments, which the wind kept herded close, and it rose and fell with

THE STRENGTH OF MEN

the low, long heave of the waves: the very compactness of these separate particles depended, from moment to moment, upon the caprice of the wind and the influences at work within the body of the pack and in the waters beneath, which cannot be accounted for. Save upon the scattered pans, which had resisted the grinding of the pack, but were even then lifting themselves out of the press and falling back in pieces; save upon these few pans, there was no place where a man could rest his foot: for where he set it down there it sank. He must leap—leap—leap from one sinking fragment to another, choosing in a flash where next to alight, chancing his weight where it might be sustained for the moment of gathering to leap again—he must leap without pause; he must leap or the pack would let him through and close over his head. Moreover, the wind swept over the pack with full force and a stinging touch, and it was filled with the dust of snow: a wind which froze and choked and blinded where it could. But in the lead of Saul Nash, who was like a swaying shadow in the snow ahead, thirty men made the hundred yards and dispersed to the pans to wait—thirty of thirty—

THE WAY OF THE SEA

three, not counting the skipper, who had lingered far back to see the last of the work of his hands.

"Leave us—wait—here," said Saul, between convulsive pants, when, with John and ol' Bill Anderson, he had come to rest on a small pan. He turned his back to the wind to catch his breath. "Us'll clear—the shoal—here," he added.

Ol' Bill fell, exhausted. He shielded his mouth with his arm. "'Tis so good as any place," he gasped.

"'Tis big enough for seven men," said John.

Bill was an old hand—an old hand; and he had been in the thick of the pitiless slaughter of seals for five days. "Us'll let noa moare aboard, b'y," he cried. He started to his elbow and looked around; but he saw no one making for the pan, so he said to Saul, "'Tis too small for three. Leave the young feller look out for hisself some other——"

"Bill," said Saul, "the lad bides here."

Bill was an old hand. He laughed in scorn. "Maybe," said he, "if the sea gets at this pan—to-morrow, or nex' day, Saul—if the sea gets at un,

THE STRENGTH OF MEN

an' wears un down, 'tis yourself'll be the first t' push the lad off, an' not——"

"Does you hear me, Bill! I says the lad——"

John plucked Saul's sleeve. "'Tis goain' abroad," he said, sweeping his hand over the pack.

Then a hush fell upon the ice—a hush that deepened and spread, and soon left only the swish of the gale and the muffled roar of the shoal. It came creeping from the west like a sigh of relief. The driving force of the wind had somewhere been mysteriously counteracted. The pressure was withdrawn. The pack was free. It would disperse into its separate parts. A veering of the wind—the impact of some vagrant field—a current or a tide—a far-off rock: who knows what influence? The direction of the pack was changed. It would swerve outward from the Blueblack shoal.

"Back, men! She'll goa clear o' the shoal!"

That was the skipper. They could see him standing with his back to the gale and his hands to his mouth. Beyond, in the mist of snow, the schooner lay tossing; her ropes and spars were a web and her hull was a shadow.

"Back! Back!"

THE WAY OF THE SEA

There was a zigzag, plunging race for the schooner—for *more life*: for the hearth-fires of Ragged Harbour and the lips of wives and the clinging fingers of babies, which swam, as in a golden cloud, in the snow the wind was driving over the deck. The ice went abroad. The pack thinned and fell away into its fragments, which then floated free in widening gaps of sea. The way back was vanishing—even the sinking way over which they had come. Old James Moth, the father of eight, mischosed the path; when he came to the end of it he teetered, for a space, on two small cakes, neither of which would bear him, and when his feet had forced them wide he fell back and was drowned. Ezra Bull—he who married pretty Mary o' Brunt Cove that winter—missed his leap and fell between two pans which swung together with crushing force in the trough of the lop; he sank without a cry when they went abroad. It was then perceived that the schooner had gathered way and was drifting faster than the pack through which she was pushing. As the ice fell away before her, her speed increased. The crew swerved to head her off. It was now a race

THE STRENGTH OF MEN

without mercy or reproach. As the men converged upon the schooner's side their paths merged into one—a narrow, shifting way to the ice in her lee: and it was in the encounters of that place that three men lost their lives. Two tumbled to their death locked in each other's arms, and one was bested and flung down. When Saul and John, the last of all, came to that one patch of loose ice where the rail was within reach, a crowd of seven was congested there; and, with brute unreason, they were fighting for the first grip; so fast was the schooner slipping away, there was time left for but four, at most, to clamber aboard. They had no firm foothold. No single bit of ice would hold a man up. It was like a fight upon quicksand. Men clawed the backs of men to save themselves from sinking; blows were struck; screams ended in coughs; throats were thick; oaths poured from mouths that were used to prayers. . . .

“Saul! Saul! She'll slip away from we.”

She was drifting faster. The loosened pack divided before her prows. She was scraping through the ice, leaving it behind her, faster and

THE WAY OF THE SEA

faster yet. The blind crowd amidships plunged along with her, all the while losing something of their position.

“Steady, John, b’y,” said Saul. “For’ard there—under the quarter.”

“Iss, Saul. Oh, make haste!”

In a moment they were under the forward quarter, standing firm on a narrow pan of ice, waiting for the drift of the schooner to bring the rail within reach. When that time came, Saul caught the lad up and lifted him high. But she was dragging the men who clung to her. They were now within arm’s reach of John. Even as he drew himself up a hand was raised to catch his foot. Saul struck at the arm. Then he felt a clutch on his own ankle—a grip that tightened. He looked down. His foot was released. He saw a hand stretched up, and stooped to grasp it; it was suddenly withdrawn. The face of a man wavered in the black water and disappeared. Saul knew that a touch of his hand was as near as ol’ Bill Anderson had come to salvation. Then the fight was upon him. A man clambered on his back. He felt his foothold sinking — tipping — sinking. But he

THE STRENGTH OF MEN

wriggled away, turned in a rush of terror to defend himself, and grappled with this man. They fell to the ice, each trying to free himself from the other; their weight was distributed over a wider surface of fragments, so they were borne up while they fought. The rest trampled ever them. Before they could recover and make good their footing, the ship had drifted past. They were cut off from her by the open water in her wake. She slipped away like a shadow, vaguer grew, and vanished in the swirling snow. But a picture remained with Saul: that of a lad, in a cloud of snow, leaning over the rail, which was a shadow, with his mouth wide open in a cry, which was lost in the tumult of wind and hoarse voices, and with his hand stretched out; and he knew that John was aboard, and would come safe to Ragged Harbour. They would count the lost, he thought, as he leaped instinctively from cake to cake to keep himself out of the water; they would count the lost, he thought, when they had cleared the pack and were riding out the gale under bare poles.

“For’ard, there—stand by, some o’ you!”

THE WAY OF THE SEA

It was the skipper's voice, ringing in the white night beyond. There was an answering trample, like the sound of footfalls departing.

"Show a bit o' that jib!"

The words were now blurred by the greater distance. Saul listened for the creak and rattle of the sail running up the stays, but heard nothing.

"Sau-au-l-l!"

The long cry came as from far off, beating its way against the wind, muffled by the snow between.

That was the last.

Now, the man was stripped to his strength—to his naked strength: to his present store of vigour and heat and nutriment, plenteous or depleted, as might be; nor could he replenish it, for a mischance of the lifelong fight had at last flung him into the very swirl of the sea's forces, and he was cut off and illimitably compassed about by the five enemies. Grey shades, gathering in the snow to the east, vast and forbidding, betrayed the advance of the night. The wind, renewing its force, ran over the sea in whirling blasts; and to the wind the snow added its threefold bitterness.

THE STRENGTH OF MEN

The open water, which widened as the pack fell away, fretted and fumed under the whip of the wind; little waves hissed viciously and flung spume to leeward, foreboding the combing swells to come. The cold pressed in, encroaching stealthfully; touching a finger here, and twining a tentacle there; sucking out warmth all the while. He was cut off, as I have said, and compassed about by the five enemies. He was stripped of rudder and sail. It was a barehanded fight—strength to strength. Escape was by endurance—by enduring the wind and the waves and the cold until such a time as the sea's passion wasted itself and she fell into that rippling, sunny mood in which she gathers strength for new assault. Even now, it was as though the fragments of ice over which he was aimlessly leaping tried to elude him—to throw him off. So he cast about for better position—for place on some pan, which would be like a wall to the back of an outnumbered man. After a time he found a pan, to which three men had already fled. He had to swim part way; but they helped him up, for the pan was thirty feet square, and there was room for him.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"Be it you, Samuel?" said Saul.

"Iss, 'tis I—an' Matthew Weather and Andrew Butts."

Saul took off his jacket to wring it out. "Were it you, Matthew, b'y," he said, making ready to put it on again, "were it you jumped on me back—out there?"

"Sure, an' I doan't know, Saul. Maybe 'twere. I forgets. 'Twere terrible—out there."

"Iss, 'twere, b'y. I were just a-wonderin'."

They sat down—huddled in the middle of the pan; the snow eddied over and about them, and left drifts behind. Soon the pack vanished over the short circumference of sight. Then small waves began to break over the pan to windward. The water rolled to Saul's shoes and lapped them.

"How many does you leave t' hoame, Matthew?" said Saul.

"Nine, Saul."

"Sure, b'y," Matthew's brother, Samuel, cried, impatiently, "you forgets the baby. 'Tis ten, b'y, countin' the baby."

"Oh, iss—'tis true!" said Matthew. "Countin' the last baby an' little Billy Tuft, 'tis ten. I

THE STRENGTH OF MEN

were a foster father t' little Billy. Iss—'tis ten I left. 'Tis quare I forgot the baby."

It *was* queer, for he loved them all, and he had had a doctor from Tilt Cove for the last baby: maybe the cold was to blame for that forgetfulness.

"You leaves moare 'n me, Matthew," said Saul. "I leaves oan'y one."

The snow cloud darkened. Night had crept near. The shadow overhung the pan. More, the wind had a sweep over open water, for the pack was now widely distributed. Larger waves ran at the pan, momentarily increasing in number and height. One swept it—a thin sheet of water, curling from end to end. Then another; then three in quick succession, each rising higher.

"Iss—a lass, ben't she?" said Matthew, taking up the talk again.

"A girl, Matthew," said Saul. "A girl," he repeated, after a moment's silence, "just a wee bit of a girl. 'Tis like John 'll look after she."

"Oh, sure, b'y—sure! 'Tis like John will."

"Does you think he'll see to her schoolin', b'y?" said Saul. "She *do* be a bright one, that

THE WAY OF THE SEA

lass—that wee girlye.” He smiled a tender, wistful smile—like a man who looks back, far back, upon some happiness. “’Twould be a pity,” he went on, softly, “t’ leave she goa without her schoolin’.”

The wind was at the sea. It gathered the waves—drove them along in combing swells. It tore off their crests and swept spume with the snow. Great waves broke on every side—near at hand with a heavy swish, in the distance with a continuing roar. It was but a matter of chance, thus far, that one had not broken over the pan.

“Does you know what I thinks, Saul?” said Matthew. “Does you know what I thinks about that b’y John? He’s a clever lad, that. He does well with the lobsters, now, doan’t he, for a lad? Iss——”

“Iss,” said Saul, “he does that, b’y. Iss he does.”

“He’ll have a cod trap some day, that lad. They’s nothin’ ol’ Luke Dart woan’t do for un; an’ they’s noa better trader on these shores than Luke. He’ll be rich, John will—rich! An’ ’tis

THE STRENGTH OF MEN

like he'll send that little maid o' yourn t' school t' Saint John's. That's what I thinks about it —'tis."

"Does you?" said Saul. "Does you think that? May be. He've a terrible fancy for that wee girl. He brings she mussels an' lobsters, do John, an' big star-fish an' bake-apples an'——"

"Sure, he do," said Matthew. "B'y," he added, impressively, "'twould surprise nobody if he'd give she music-lessons t' Saint John's."

"That lass!" said Saul. "Does you think he'll give she music-lessons—that wee thing?"

"Iss, sure! An' she'll play the organ in the church t' Ragged Harbour—when they gets one. She'll be growed up then."

"Iss, maybe," said Saul.

There was a long time in which no word was spoken. A wave broke near, and rose to the waists of the men. No one stirred.

"Does they l'arn you about—about—how t' goa about eatin', t' Saint John's?" said Saul. "All about—knives—an' forks?"

"Eh, b'y?" said Matthew, spurring himself to attend.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

“I always thought I’d like she t’ know about they things—when she grows up,” said Saul.

Soon, he stood up: for the waves were rising higher. In the words of the Newfoundlander, he stood up to face the seas. The others had so far succumbed to cold and despair that they sat where they were, though the waves, which continuously ran over the pan, rose, from time to time, to their waists. It was night: the man’s world was then no more than a frozen shadow, pitching in a space all black and writhing; and from the depths of this darkness great waves ran at him to sweep him off—increasing in might, innumerable, extending infinitely into the night. All the concerns of life—deeds done, things loved, tears, dreams, joys: these all melted into a golden, changing vision, floating far back, which glowed, and faded, and came again, and vanished. Wave came upon the heels of wave, each, as it were, with livelier hate and a harder blow—a massive shadow, rushing forth; a blow, a lifting, a tug, and a hiss behind: but none overcame him. Then a giant wave delivered its assault: it came ponderously—lifted itself high above his head, broke above him, fell, beat him

THE STRENGTH OF MEN

down; it swept him back, rolling him over and over, but he caught a ridge of ice with his fingers, and he held his place, though the waters tugged at him mightily. He recovered his first position, and again he was beaten down; but again he rose to face the sea, and again a weight of water crushed him to his knees. Thus three more times, without pause: then a respite, in which it was made known to him that one other had survived.

“Be it you, Matthew?” said Saul.

“Noa—’tis Andrew Butts. I be fair done out, Saul.”

Saul gathered his strength to continue the fight—to meet the stress and terrors of the hours to come: for it was without quarter, this fight; there is no mercy in cold, nor is there any compassion in the great Deep. Soon—it may have been two hours after the assault of the five great waves—the seas came with new venom and might; they were charged with broken ice, massed fragments of the pack, into which the wind had driven the pan, or, it may be, with the slush of pans, which the Blueblack Shoal had discharged. The ice added weight and a new terror to the waves. They bruised and dazed and

THE WAY OF THE SEA

sorely hurt the man when they fell upon him. No wave came but carried jagged chunks of ice—some great and some small; and these they flung at the men on the pan, needing only to strike here or there to kill them. Saul shielded his head with his arms. He was struck on the legs and on the left side; and once he was struck on the breast and knocked down. After a while—it may have been an hour after the fragments first appeared in the water—he was struck fair on the forehead; his senses wavered, but his strength continued sufficiently, and soon he forgot that he had so nearly been fordome. Again, after a time—it may now have been three hours before midnight—other greater waves came. They broke over his head. They cast their weight of ice upon him. There seemed to be no end to their number. Once, Saul, rising from where they had beaten him—rising doggedly to face them again—found that his right arm was powerless. He tried to lift it, but could not. He felt a bone grate over a bone in his shoulder—and a stab of pain. So he shielded his head from the ice in the next wave with his left arm—and from the ice in the next, and in the next, and

THE STRENGTH OF MEN

the next. . . . The wave had broken his collar-bone.

And thus, in diminishing degree, for fifteen hours longer.

The folk of Neighborly Cove say that when the wind once more herded the pack and drove it in-shore, Saul Nash, being alone, made his way across four miles of loose ice to the home of Abraham Coachman, in the lee of God's Warning, Sop's Arm way, where they had corn-meal for dinner; but Saul has forgotten that—this and all else that befell him after the sea struck him that brutal blow on the shoulder: the things of the whirling night, of the lagging dawn, when the snow thinned and ceased, and of the grey, frowning day, when the waves left him in peace. A crooked shoulder, which healed of itself, and a broad scar, which slants from the tip of his nose far up into his hair, tell him that the fight was hard. But what matter—all this? Notwithstanding all, when next the sea baited its trap with swarming herds, he set forth with John, his brother, to the hunt; for the world which lies hidden in the wide beyond has some strange need of seal-

THE WAY OF THE SEA

fat, and stands ready to pay, as of course. It pays gold to the man at the counter in Saint John's; and for what the world pays a dollar the outport warrior gets a pound of reeking pork. But what matter? What matter—all this toil and peril? What matter when the pork lies steaming on the table and the yellow duff is in plenty in the dish. What matter when, beholding it, the blue eyes of the lads and little maids flash merrily? What matter when the strength of a man provides so bounteously that his children may pass their plates for more? What matter—when there comes a night wherein a man may rest? What matter—in the end? Ease is a shame; and, for truth, old age holds nothing for any man save a seat in a corner and the sound of voices drifting in.

THE RAGING OF THE SEA

Chapter III

THE RAGING OF THE SEA

ROUND about Ragged Harbour the rocks are stark naked; the ice and wind and rain and fires of unnumbered years have stripped the coast to its unsightly ribs. The untracked wilderness, of a growth scraggly and stunted, crowds the cottages to the verge of the sea; it yields sparse provision of berry and wild beast: nor will the shallow earth of the shore oases of itself produce food, but, through years, must be increased and fostered, and fed with caplin and the entrails of cod. Rock and wilderness are allied to turn the people to the grey, niggardly sea for sustenance. With a saw and an axe and a fistful of oakum the men of the place make for themselves punts, labouring in the wilderness with the strength of fat pork and flour; and in these puny craft they put forth to recover their own, the fishes of the sea, over which God gave them dominion, as the parsons teach:

THE WAY OF THE SEA

here, in truth, as the old song says, the fish are "lives o' men." Now, every man's punt is the work of his own hands. To her he transmits himself: she is his child—partaker in his flaws, caprices, strength and virtues; which may be manifest in a leak or a list or a makeshift or a crank, or in stanchness, fleetness and fine grace, as it may chance. She reflects him, her creator; hence the proverb, *Show me his punt, and I'll tell you what kind of a man he is.* She is small, finite—comprehensible: the heavy, overhanging sky, the illimitable sea and a coast veiled by distance are past understanding. So the man and the punt sound the depths of intimacy: they live the days through together, dawn to dark—wind, sleet or sunshine; and they wear out together, if they have not in youth come to the same end.

It may be that in her under parts—in some twist of keel or bottom—Job Luff's punt was most wondrously constructed; to the casual eye, which was invariably contemptuous, she was stubby and stupidly squat. That is not to say that she had the phlegm of rotundity, for with all her heaviness of

THE RAGING OF THE SEA

outline—her loggy, sullen guise at anchor—she had an evil reputation for nerves: the bad name of a slender rake of a craft; and she was damned as a reprobate crank in three harbours for the lives that had been lost from her. The gossip of the flake and the stage, had she but understood, would have touched her true old heart to the quick. When they rallied Job Luff on her ways, he made vague allusion to a salmon's belly; so it may be that her perversity proceeded from a crank in her keel or bottom, for Job had fashioned both in secret. So be it: she was sensitive, timorous, moody; she was wilful as the wind, and full of caprice as a high-bred racing yacht. Moreover, she was a slattern: her coat of paint was bedraggled and tattered; her rigging was spliced, weather-worn, and commonly awry; her loutish spread of canvas was marvellously patched, and foul with the reek of old storms; her thole-pins were loose, her ribs warped, her foot-board cracked and scaly; and on a damp day she was intolerable even to the noses of Ragged Harbour. But these last were insignificant externals—mere old clothes: well-worn overalls and a jumper. She was a well-intentioned punt; all she demanded

THE WAY OF THE SEA

was a modicum of faith, and a sympathetic hand on sheet and steering oar, which is to say that she craved to be understood. She nosed her way through high seas with gusto. In the sight of Job Luff her only fault was that she was a laggard in a light wind, and he freely forgave her that.

Skipper Bill Butts observed the miraculous career of the punt for three years; then he could curb his curiosity no longer.

“Job, b’y,” said he, in the twilight of one day, “haul un high an’ dry, an’ leave us see the bottom o’ she.”

“’Twere a nasty lōp off the Three Poor Sisters this day,” said Job, with a wag of his head.

“Hut, b’y! Haul un high an’ dry. They be nar an eye t’ see.”

“They be a fine sign o’ fish t’ Round ’Arbour, they do say,” said Job. He cast off from the stage in haste.

“Sure, you dunderhead, I’ll trade you a quintal o’ fish for a sight o’ the——”

“’Tis a salmon-belly punt, skipper,” Job whispered; then he made off for the bait skiff, for the horn had opportunely sounded.

THE RAGING OF THE SEA

It was in the image of this Job Luff that she was made: a tawny lout, frowsy, greasy, shiftless; with a queer twist to him—a glint in his eye, a fleck of red in his shifty glance. It was inevitable: in the years of her building—seven indolent winters with a rotten keel at the end—he had fashioned her of scraps in his own likeness; had he combed his beard of a Sunday morning, she would have flaunted a new sail the next day. But he had cast loose from religion when old Dick Lute went mad of it, and was haled from the harbour and the things thereof south to Saint John's; maintaining—the tawny one—that “thinkin’ on things e-tarnal” was too stiff a gale for him to weather: it would capsize any man in the end; and as for him, he did not propose to try out his reason in an off-shore squall with the fog as thick as bags. Whereupon he achieved a lurid reputation for unrighteousness, a name to live long in tradition; for pretence to righteousness is conventional in those parts. He lived up to the obligation of scouting hell-fire; he smoked, said “By Gawd!” (in fine weather), left his nets out over Sunday, sold more quintals than he caught and gave away half as much again—which is an invidious remark

THE WAY OF THE SEA

—and looked hell in the teeth in every gale that blew. He had a religion of his own; it was this: that all the men of Bonavist' Bay were cock-eyed, and all the women knock-kneed. In ten years he had found seventeen church-members incautious enough to dispute the latter tenet: them he flayed on the spot. At such times the cranky punt found public favour; what with her load of iniquity, men said—the blatant laughter of Job Luff still tingling their ears—it was to her credit that she had turned turtle but six times. But the punt was in no haste to hurtle Job to his reward; she cheerfully ran into the jaws of death at his bidding, and managed to scurry out with him before they snapped shut. For all of which Job loved her.

In the days before the tide lured little Skipper Jo and Ezekiel Sevier into the maw of the sea (when all the mysteries of sea and sky and wilderness were revealed in a flash), never a great wind came but they sped to Lookout Head to see Job Luff beat in; thus:

“Hi, b’y!” Ezekiel cried. “Leave us goa t’ the Head t’ see Job Luff fetch the punt in. They be a big sea outside.”

THE RAGING OF THE SEA

“ ’Tis a mean small lop, Ezekiel Sevier ! ’Tis noa sea at all.”

“ Sure b’y ; ’tis a awful tumble. Hark to un ! It may be the devil’ll snatch Job Luff the day.”

Jo listened to the breakers. “ I’ll goa, Ezekiel Sevier,” said he. “ Bear a hand with me caplin, b’y. I’ve but a bucket t’ spread.”

The caplin was spread in a hurry ; then off they pattered up the hill, little Billy Luff tagging behind. With tense interest the three watched Job skim through the tickle with all sail set, the fleet, close-reefed, still blurred in the mist.

“ ’Tis a barb’rous bad punt,” Jo observed, per-versely.

“ ’Tis a sinful cranky punt,” said Ezekiel. “ Sammy Arnold do say ’tis.”

Billy Luff puffed himself up. “ ’Tis the best punt t’ Ragged ’Arbour,” said he.

“ She’ll goa t’ wreck on Mad Mull in a east wind,” said Jo.

“ Noa, an’ she won’t,” said Billy Luff.

“ She’ll capsize in a squall off the Sisters,” said Ezekiel.

“ Noa, an’ she won’t, neither,” Billy Luff

THE WAY OF THE SEA

whimpered. "Sure, me fawther can handle she."

"I knows," said Jo. "She'll turn over in the tickle. She've sheets 's rotten 's oakum. She'll goa t' wreck on Black Rock."

"Sure, b'ys," said Ezekiel, "you can stick your thumb in her paddle at the butt, 'tis that rotten."

"Noa, she woan't," screamed Billy Luff. "Me fawther ain't afeard of a wind what blows."

All notwithstanding, through the years Job Luff caught fish; thus, innocently, he scandalised the name of the Almighty and put the wrathful sea to scorn. Punt and man fathomed the duplicity of the winds, circumvented the stealthful strategy of fogs and tides and currents, craftily fled the might of high seas, and left the yawning breakers hungry: worsting the venomous enmity of the Deep and its allies with all the cunning and sullen courage of the true child of that desolation. What was she to him? This: in the vast twilight silences, when she rode a lurid sea and the flaring heavens seemed about to break with their weight of rising cloud, he fondled her ropes and felt her gunwale and mast; and the familiar touch of these

THE RAGING OF THE SEA

things of the solid waste steadied the faculties which the infinite expanse and flaming, threatening heights had made to reel. More, in the face of the frowning dawn, in the meshes of the night, in the swift descent of great winds, she stayed him; nor was he ever afraid of the sea he plundered, though it raged. Hence he forgave her much. When a capful of wind turned her keel up in the harbour, he came to the surface with a mouthful of hilarious "By Gawds!" and he spat them out as he towed her ashore, loving her all the more for her adorable high spirits; and when she drifted in with the tide, leaving Jonathan Aker dead in the depths off Mad Mull, he told Jonathan's widow, with some asperity, that her husband should long ago have learned to swim.

In the hot days, between the times of caplin and herring, when there is no bait, and the fish are jigged from the shallows, Job Luff followed the sign to Windy Cove, with Bully Luff, his boy, at the bow oars, to keep the head of the punt up, if luck should be with them; and there he found the cod, nine fathoms deep, dawdling in the shadow

THE WAY OF THE SEA

of the rocks. The fish had eluded the fleet for three days; and now the fleet was stupidly hanging off shore in the sun-soaked breeze, tossing in the lop, and flocked like aimless sheep. Billy kept the boat out of the breakers' grasp while Job jerked up the fish on the prongs of his jigger. Never the flash of a scale got to the spying eyes of the fleet, for Job Luff—the tawny old reprobate—worked the jigging line with one hand and held his pipe in the other, meantime giving great and delusive clouds to the breeze; and he slipped the catch over the gunwale under cover of his great body, and, with a sinful chuckle, added it to the rising heap under the tarpaulin. The fleet lookouts kept keen watch on one another. They shot many a glance to Windy Cove, on the alert for the gleam of a fish; and they whispered to their mates at the unfruitful lines that Job Luff was lazing the day away in the shade of the shore, catching nothing.

“Do they be cotchin’ anything off shoare, b’y?” Job asked.

“Nar a belly do I see, zur,” said Billy Luff.

The fish were thick. Job’s arm was wearing out. He hauled in a great cod, caught by the tail, and slid it under cover.

THE RAGING OF THE SEA

“Eleazar Manuel do have his eye on we, zur,” said Billy.

“Dunderhead!” chuckled Job. “Where be they now, b’y?”

“They be taggin’ after Sevior to——”

“Do he be comin’ this way, b’y?” Job asked in alarm.

“Sure, noa, zur; he do be goain’ wing an’ wing for the grounds off the Mull, zur. They be handy to his starn.”

At the last it was a gunwale load. The catch overflowed the holds, fore and aft—lay glistening everywhere; the punt was sunk low with its weight. Lord, how goodly a catch it was! What a triumph in the sight of men! Here was a fat fellow, almost as big as Billy himself. It was the promise of a jew’s harp and a bull’s-eye and a picture of the Queen. The sea had been plundered of six of that weight—six fat, sleepy fellows. There they lay, flapping their shiny tails! When the trader should bring his treasure-ship into the harbour they would be turned into raisins and a red handkerchief. Job vowed it then and there. The silver bellies in the afterhold rippled with smiles. They dazzled the

THE WAY OF THE SEA

eyes of Job Luff. Here was a length of calico for the little maid. Here were molasses and tea for more winter evenings than one. Gleam chased gleam over the scales in the forehold. The catch shot silvery flashes back at the sun. This was a plug of tobacco; that one would go with the broose for breakfast; this would put a pane in the loft-window when the snow flew; that would give the good wife a new spade. There was a song in the heart of the man. It was the song of the victor. Such a catch it was! He would work no more for three days. He would lie in the sun of the hill-side. He would climb the cliff and watch the gulls circle over the sea. It was a gunwale load! The sea had been plundered while she slept.

“The fleet do be runnin’ hoame, zur,” said Billy Luff. “They be scootin’ for the easter tickle.”

It was not yet night. “Hoame, b’y!” exclaimed Job.

“Iss, zur. Eleazar Manuel do be in the lead. He’ve a reef to his mains’l. They be goain’ fast, zur. Jacob Sevier do be reefin’ his sail now.”

The sea, as visible from the cove, was placid; the sky was an unruffled blue. “They must be wind

THE RAGING OF THE SEA

t'other side o' the Head," said Job. "Pull out, b'y."

Billy Luff pulled out, with his heart in a flutter of fear.

It was a gale from the north-east—the raging of the sea: it had burst from those moody distances which are beyond the ken of the coast; wherein, in the experience of the men of the place, peril lurks always. It had come like a force bent on ravage. There had been no premonition in sea or sky; it had caught the little fleet of Ragged Harbour napping off Mad Mull. The zenith was overcast with thin clouds, which the wind had torn to shreds. They spread themselves quickly over the blue in the west; they raced to obscure the sun. Heavy clouds, with waving tatters, rose solemnly from the horizon, which was black. Far off the sea was grey with spume; and the spume and the horizontal clouds were as though indistinguishably woven into the white-flecked fringe of a curtain of cloud, vast and impenetrable. From this advancing grey-ness the punts scurried for the harbour tickle like scared hares. Or it may be said that they were like brown leaves tossed by a November wind. Now,

THE WAY OF THE SEA

they laboured over the crest of a swell; now, they were sunk in the trough, with only the peaks of the mains'ls showing. The last square inch of canvas they could stand was set. The gusts, outriders of the gale, heeled them until their gunwales were fairly under. It was a race for cover, a flight from might and black wrath, with the fuming enemy hot in chase.

"We be cotched, zur," said Billy Luff.

Windy Cove is narrow and precipitous. Above and below, the cliffs rise sheer. There is surf in every part. The water is spread with foam. The place is noisy with the crash of wave against rock. There is no harbour there. It is a trap for punts in a gale from the nor'east. The trap shuts when the wind strikes with full force.

"We be cotched, zur!"

It was a question of abandoning punt and catch.

"You goa ashoare, b'y," said Job, sharply. "The punt do be too heavy a'ready." He pushed the boy aft. "By Gawd, I'll take un in safe!" He snatched up the oars. "They be no wind that blows the punt can't ride out." The flare that

THE RAGING OF THE SEA

proclaimed the twist in the man was now in his eyes. "Get t' hoame by the goaat path, Man-o'-War way, b'y."

"Sure, I be 'feared o' the leap, zur."

"Hut!"

Job backed the punt toward a break in the rock. Billy made ready to leap for the foothold it offered. Job let the punt sweep in with a breaker, stern on. His oars were poised—alert.

"Jump, b'y!"

The water sank. The boat went down with it as though to its wreck. A black abyss opened before the boy. He hesitated. Job pulled the punt out of danger before the breaker had fastened its grip upon it. He said nothing.

"I be 'feared, zur."

"Hark t' the gale, b'y!"

The sky was black overhead. A strange dusk was filling Windy Cove. The gale was so near that they could hear the sea hiss.

"Iss, zur."

"You be a true man, b'y!" Job exclaimed.

Billy crouched to spring. Job let the punt drift in, ready, as before, to pull out before the time of

THE WAY OF THE SEA

grace was past. It went swiftly to the verge of the abyss.

“Now!”

Billy leaped. He landed sure and clung to the rock like a mussel. Job was breathless when he had wrested the punt from the breaker's clutch.

“Oh, fawther!” Billy cried. He was looking down from the solid ground above. He was overcome by that terror which an advancing storm inspires.

Job had pulled through half the distance to sea room when the gale struck the cove. The water seethed about the punt. The spume covered the man. Noise confused him—noise compounded and re-echoing, as in a cavern. It was as though the wind tried to push him into the depths of the cove, where the breakers could grasp him to his undoing. The wind swept from a wide place into a narrow. It was like water rushing through a straitened channel. In confusion he could not prevail against that force. He drifted back. The distance between the punt and the breakers diminished by inches. The space lessened vividly. The punt had no part in this fight. She was the prize.

THE RAGING OF THE SEA

It was the wind pitted against the man's spirit and the sheer strength of his arms and back. The wind veered of a sudden. It caught the punt on the port bow and struggled to turn it broadside. This was the crisis. Had the right arm of the man weakened, the wind would have won mortal advantage in the increased surface exposed to its force. Job perceived the imminence of disaster. He concentrated his strength in his right arm, and forced the bow back into the wind's eye. His muscles were sore of the strain put upon them; and he was now bleeding at the nose. But the momentary gain steadied him. He exerted his strength intelligently. He pulled with craft, taking advantage of every lull to creep up. Thus he drew away from the breakers. He could count the inches as they made feet. Inch was added to inch, foot to foot. Inches were lost and feet were gained. Soon the punt had to take the head-seas. Had she shipped water now, the end would not long have been delayed. But she rose to them, split them, beat them down. In half an hour the man was beyond the juts of the cove. He had sea room: with thirty seconds of leeway in which to ship his oars,

THE WAY OF THE SEA

place his steering oar, and shake out a bit of canvas.

It was time enough. It took him twenty seconds to show a rag of sail and get the scull oar in his fist: that was ten seconds off the rocks. He shook the sheet and jammed down the oar. The punt quivered into life. She gathered way, leaped, stopped dead; then she ran for the open sea like an eager hound.

“Now for it, lass!” Job cried. Thus the first stirrings of the joy of conflict expressed themselves.

The escape was into new peril. The gale had trailed wet dusk over the harbour and the sea between. The tickle, through which the fleet had now fled to the sanctuary of the harbour basin, was marked by its breakers. It was but a splash of white in vague distance. The sea was a grey, tossing waste, with shadowy limits. The surges in the northeast communicated their restlessness to its depths. The shallow surface waves took contrary direction with the madcap wind—excited themselves to bewilderment, to irrational force and volume. Thus the attack was delivered upon flank and front simultaneously. The punt was laden

THE RAGING OF THE SEA

with the catch. Did she complain of the load? She called it ballast. There's a brave heart for you! She rammed the black, spume-crested waves, each in its turn, as they rose to strike. They came in infinite numbers, rank upon the heels of rank, the plumes of the pressing host stretching far into the immeasurable expanse. Let the creaking of her old timbers be likened to eager whines! In that spirit she attacked. Interminably the waters rose to engulf her. She sprang at them, faltering only to gather force; she struck them fair; she shattered them into spray; she shook herself free of the clogging fragments, and plunged on with such grit and strength as swells the heart to see. But engulfment was continuously imminent. Every wave was a separate peril. Each had a force and altitude and form and position of its own. Each, as it lay crushed and frothing in the wake, was replaced by a fellow; and so without end. Then, too, the punt had a limitation. There was a wave too great for her, one whose force she could not withstand, staunch as she was. It would overwhelm her though it were but infinitesimally beyond her strength to resist. There were a myriad such, and

THE WAY OF THE SEA

greater, scattered between the punt and the harbour. But Job would not throw out the catch. He held the little craft to her course, this atom of the solid ground; he accepted the hazard.

The folk of Ragged Harbour—the two hundred souls—were gathered on Lookout Head to watch Job Luff beat in, as they had gathered many times before. They were standing full in the wind on a slope of rock high above the sea. Job's wife was there, with her brood hanging to her fluttering skirts. The rain had ceased. The air was washed clean. The sea was suffused with grey light. The punt was clear to the patch on her sail.

“Why doan't he heave his catch over?” cried Jim Rideout.

“She'll swamp when he fetches about,” said Eleazar Manuel.

“I mind me he've weathered warse gales, Eleazar Manuel,” said Job Luff's wife.

“She'll swamp like a flash, woman.”

Job stood off to the south. The new tack was cleverly taken. The punt was now almost broadside to the rock.

THE RAGING OF THE SEA

“What’s he to?”

“Runnin’ for Boot Cove, b’y.”

“He’ve lost hisself. The lop do be too heavy t’ land.”

“Do he be heavin’ his fish over, Eleazar?” This was Sammy Arnold, who was near blind of old age.

“He be’s comin’ about.”

“’Tis a clever hand with a punt,” said Jim Rideout. “He be’s comin’ in on this tack.”

“Do he be heavin’ his fish over, b’y?” Sammy Arnold demanded.

“Noa, b’y. Not Job Luff!”

The punt came tearing in through a head-sea, reeling, plunging. Job held her up to it with that rag of a sail.

“Do he be shippin’ water, Eleazar?” Again Sammy Arnold.

“He do be bailin’ now.”

“Have he his sheet fast, b’y? I do be blind this day.”

“Iss, sure; ’tis tied to his foot.”

Job managed the sheet with his foot. He worked the steering oar with his right hand, and bailed with the other.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

“ ’Tis a stiff punt,” said Sammy Arnold.

“ ’Tis that.”

The punt was coming to her own. Ragged Harbour watched her keenly as she reeled through that head-sea. In all the years of her unhonoured life, not so much had been said before.

“ ’Tis a gran’ punt,” said Eleazar Manuel.

“ ’Tis the best punt t’ Ragged Harbour.”

There was no one to gainsay it. In the end the ill-favoured craft had found honour.

Job was under the Head. The tickle stretched from before him to the calm of the harbour basin. The punt’s fight was won. It was for the man to sweep through to placid water; but not through placid water—through noise and tumultuous waves, a narrow place where the breakers reach from the rocks on either side like claws. It was for him to sweep through to placid water: then he must pull to the stage and land the fish. The sure path was the middle. Deviation meant wreck, inevitable wreck if the breakers so much as laid a finger on the boat. It was but sport for a sure hand and an eye alert. So be it: the hand must be continuously sure and the eye alert always. In re-

THE RAGING OF THE SEA

sponse to the oar the punt veered and sped like an arrow for the middle. Job ran his eye over the catch. Then, madly exultant, he looked up to the people on the rock. He had won! It was a triumph for courage and the punt. But in that vaunting glance he betrayed the punt. A puff of wind caught the rag of a sail: elsewhere, a breath to be disregarded; here and now, with an unwatchful hand on the sheet, a transcendent peril. Job's eyes were on the people. Every faculty was submerged in his exultation. Two things followed: for one, the hand on the oar was lax; moreover, his perception of the situation of the punt—the immediate formation of the waves, and the sphere of the breakers—was, for the instant, suspended. Hence, when the wind caught the sail, its influence was not instantaneously counteracted. The moments of grace flashed past while the man rallied his faculties to meet the danger; while, too, he possessed himself anew of his immediate surroundings. His impression of the waves and breakers had to be destroyed and reconstructed. Those waves which had been photographed on his brain when he looked up at the peo-

THE WAY OF THE SEA

ple had now subsided; new ones had replaced them—waves of different form and place. Those breakers which had been gathering force to dash against the rocks had delivered their attack, had broken and fallen, and were now gathering for a new rush. The face of the tickle was a new face. He was dazed. Time was consumed, also, in determining upon a course of action. It took time to transmit directions to the hand on the oar, time for the hand to comprehend, to summon its strength and to exert it.

These were supremely momentous periods. Job had betrayed the punt. The puff of wind had swerved her from her course. A long, lean breaker, reaching far out from Black Rock, had laid hold of her and fixed its clutch. She was swept in. Her motion was like that of a falling stone—imperceptible at first, gathering speed, accelerating to a rush. The man felt the new influence in the beginning. Then he perceived that all his strength—which he now furiously exerted—could not take her to the placid water of the harbour, a few fathoms beyond. She had been carried out of her course. She was caught. She was doomed. Hence he di-

THE RAGING OF THE SEA

verted his strength to swerving her bow on to the rock, that he might save himself. The possibility of his escape was contained in seven seconds of time. He dropped the oar and leaped forward; then crouched in the bow for a spring. His eyes swept the face of the rock for a foothold while the punt advanced. There was but a flash of time for discovery and decision. The glance was swift, sure, eager. It fixed itself, at the last, on a narrow ledge. The sum of all those things which are important to a man hung upon the possibility of reaching that ledge.

Job made the leap when the punt overhung the abyss, but from sinking ground; for the wave, as though of craft, pulled the boat from his feet as he sprang.

It must be said that Black Rock is at that point near sheer. The cliff is weather-broken and rotten; frost and wind have fretted narrow ledges therein, and left a crumbling surface, which latter scales off, in most parts, under a violence no greater than the top of a child's strength. Now, the sudden descent of the punt had disturbed the man's leap. For that reason he missed his hold with one

THE WAY OF THE SEA

foot. The toe of his right boot struck the rock below the ledge. That foot found no place. Hence he tottered. His full weight was upon the other foot, which was firm fixed from toe to instep. Supreme responsibility centred, momentarily, in the muscles of that leg. But he was toppling backward: he would fall to the wave which was then crunching the punt, and he would be cast up with splinters. He clawed the rock for a handhold. His right hand caught a projection; this crumbled in his grasp. Even so, he had brought himself back to within hair's-weight of a balance; but the weight of the hair was against him. If the left hand should fail in its search, that difference would surely prevail. The third finger found a crack with a frayed edge; the nail caught a scale of rock—a loose scale, which trembled under the strain. Upon that scale—upon its tender, slender connection with the great body of rock—the issue now depended. Here all the struggle culminated—the mighty exertion of the cove, the skill and courage of the attack upon the waves, the little punt's staunch repulse of high seas: all ended in the strain the finger nail put upon the scale of rock, and that

THE RAGING OF THE SEA

strain was not greater than a thread might sustain, nor longer than a breath.

The scale held. The finger nail did not break. The man drew his body forward. The wave rose to his boot tops and washed with expiring strength about his feet. It left him safe. The punt was a splintered wreck below.

Some convulsive effort of the gale, as it tore into the distance, rent the thick, low clouds in the west. The tatters of the rift glowed crimson and gold: black was elsewhere. The sun, shooting through, gilded the crests of the waves; the sea flashed from expanse to expanse. The breakers threw iridescent spray at the sky. Hills and rocks took on their sunset garb of purple and red. Shafts of sunlight struck the bellies of the catch, and were radiantly reflected. The fishes of the gunwale load gleamed for a space, where they floated with the splinters of the punt that had gone to wreck in all honour. They shone like burnished silver while they sank, fluttering, into the black, hidden depths of the tickle. Night advanced with swift feet. Heavy clouds covered the sun as it sank. Dusk enshrouded

THE WAY OF THE SEA

the Pillar and the Staff. The wind sighed and died. Silence descended. From the summit of Black Rock Job Luff looked out over the sea to the edge of the world. There a streak of lurid red separated the sea from the sky.

It was a tragedy of that coast!

THE BREATH OF THE NORTH.

Chapter IV

THE BREATH OF THE NORTH

"I am the Wind of the North! Swift I come from the Waste of Death. Out of Silence and Solitudes vast and the Whiteness of Snow I sweep. From the Night of the North I steal with Gaunt Death in my train; and I ravage the Seas of the North, and I gather me Sons of Men."

IN the beginning of the season of rampant winds—which is the dusk of the long night—the atmospheric equilibrium of the North Polar waste trembled to a point where the weight of a man's breath might have overset it. Dread, frowning forces thickened into one vast potentiality for devastation at the frayed edge of the continent. There they ambushed the wilderness, hanging in the confines of those dark, mysterious places out of which they had come. For a space a mighty nor'-wester was poised high above the uninhabitable expanse. Its monstrous struggles to loosen itself from the sun's weakened restraint and sweep free over immeasurable areas, its straining and writhing

THE WAY OF THE SEA

and fretting, were invisible and inaudible: fraught with all the calamitous portent of a mighty silence. Who shall control storms? When the wind broke from the unknown it came careering through the northern fastnesses as though drunk of its own young strength and license. Who shall warn the wilderness of the descent of great winds? The wilderness shivered at the coming of the North Wind—cowered under its lash—lay frozen, in a silence as of old death, at its passing. With all the vagaries of unbridled strength the wind left the path to many cities, and zigzagged south-east; it coursed over the Great Bay and came tearing through the Labrador, bound for the Newfoundland upper shore. How shall the devices of men avail to warn the inhabitants of an isolation? This storm rushed out from the very innermost parts of the unexplored.

It had been a late catch, a fortuitous November gleanings of a quintal and more of cod from the Grappling Hook grounds. It had been brought in in an off-shore gale in the face of a catastrophe; because, to the last small fish, it had been needed.

THE BREATH OF THE NORTH

The traders had been gone a week from the shore while it was yet green on the flakes. Old Eleazar Manuel and his foster son, young Jim Rideout—who, as Aunt Martha said, was a rogue, and sinful mad for the maids—took it to Ford's room at Snook's Cove on a day when the dawn promised a navigable sea and a gale that might be weathered. They were now bound home to Ragged Harbour with a barrel of musty flour stowed amidships, and the punt sunk fearsomely low with the weight of it. They had come through the lop off the Cape—through the heaving and spray of restless waters—with nothing worse than a half-hour's dousing; and Rideout was soaked to the thin, rosy skin of him, and Eleazar to his hairy breast. The highlands of the objective coast lay a thin, grey streak, half hid in a thickening haze, eighteen miles straightaway across the bay. The tickle to the basin of Ragged Harbour, that narrow passage between the Pillar and the Staff, was an invisible point in seven leagues of inhospitable shore.

When the wind had spread the sea with fog, enveloping the boat, it puffed erratically for a time; then it failed utterly.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"Unship your paddles, b'y," said Eleazar; he himself rose in the shute and began to scull.

Frosty calm—a still, grim, searching cold—fell like the night; it clogged the blocks with thin ice, weighted and stiffened the sail, fashioned icicles on Eleazar's great beard, froze Jim Rideout's boots to the cross-pieces and made the vitals of both men complain.

"Sure, I wish I had she to the Harbour," said Eleazar, grimly. "'N' she were my maid, she'd bear a hand at the splitting."

Rideout's jacket was frozen stiff. It was hard for him to get free swing for his arms.

"She do be to blame for it all," Eleazar snorted.

This was the return to a disputation suspended half an hour before.

"But 'n she—" Rideout began.

"She'd split fish for her sin," Eleazar said, showing his teeth. "An' she'd plant the garden—an' spread the caplin—an'—an'—chop wood. In the sweat o' the brow o' she, she'd—she'd—she'd—chop wood."

"You do be a bay-noddie, Eleazar Manuel!"

THE BREATH OF THE NORTH

Eleazar's indignation spread to the icicles on his beard. They rattled angrily.

"A bay-noddie!" snapped young Rideout.

"I'd punish she!" Eleazar churned the water with the great scull-oar.

"Nar a thing but a bay-noddie, t' wish t' treat poor——"

"James Rideout," Eleazar said, tensely, "'n you say the name o' that woman agin, I'll heave you in the say!"

Rideout struck the ice from his oars; then pulled doggedly.

"Old Eve!" Eleazar sneered. "Sure, 'n had I been Adam, I'd 'a' trounced she for that. 'N it hadn't been for Eve, James Rideout, you'd have a fine garden t' walk in—iss, sure; an' a better roaad nor the Old Crow in the Spring, when the maids is laughing in the dusk. An' you wouldn't have t' goa out t' the grounds in a brewin' gale; an'——"

"Sure, she were but a woman, an' the Devil's a——"

"Old Eve! Huh!"

"An Eve——"

THE WAY OF THE SEA

“James Rideout, ’n you say that name once moare—’n you say un once moare, b’y—I’ll heave you in the say.”

Rideout thought it best to say no more. Eleazar was at that pitch of wrath where it was perilous to goad him. It was a proverb in Ragged Harbour that Eleazar Manuel couldn’t ’bide Eve.

“Th’ old woman!” said Eleazar.

In the interval of silent labour at the oars, the Great Wind came out of the Labrador and swept the Straits clean of schooners. The sea added to its account seven laden fore-and-afters and a lugger, thirty-nine men of the South Coast out-ports, two wives and a new-born babe; it was a reaping they tell of yet in Bay Saint Barbe—the time when the last of the Labrador fleet was bound South, full to the hatches with the Summer’s catch. Over the northern Great Barrens the gale rioted, unopposed by hill or forest—a clear, swift course. It gathered snow from the heights—hard, heavy flakes from the inexhaustible air. It was thick with them; thus it gave itself tangibility, opacity, weight. It spread white night over morass and broad plain as it coursed south for the coast forests. The last

THE BREATH OF THE NORTH of the caribou, caught in the sudden descent, were blinded, frenzied, mired and frozen; it may be that they had death dreams of the herds in the south. Lynx and red fox, bear and wolf, and all the beasts of the adjoining desolations, sought each his separate shelter; pine and cedar and silver birch tossed their arms and complained. The eastern sea—the sea of the bays—waited, grimly patient; the punt of the two men of Ragged Harbour was creeping over a long, silent swell.

“Pass the axe aft, b’y,” said Eleazar.

Rideout dropped his oars with significant readiness. It may be that the cold had even then penetrated the frozen jacket and homespun trousers; it may be that it had struck beneath the jersey of Aunt Martha’s famed knitting.

“’Tis turning cold,” Rideout said, indifferently.

Eleazar struck the sail with the flat of the axe. The coating of ice—the frozen fog—was shivered; it rattled down in thin sheets, and the punt came to an even keel. He struck the mast a heavy blow; he had to strike again—strike and haul laboriously—to free the running gear. When he took the

THE WAY OF THE SEA

scull again, he recovered the location of Ragged Harbour as by instinct.

“Flow o’ wind t’ the nor’-east,” Eleazar said.

By all the lore of the coast, a storm had passed to the north and was then raging over the track of the great ships. Else, how account for the conjunction of calm and intense cold? But the laws of storms are not immutable; as I have said, storms have all the vagaries of unbridled strength. The storm was yet in the forest, advancing swiftly.

“Eleazar,” said Rideout, “what be the colour of apples?”

This approach to the name of the woman was venturesome. Eleazar scowled from under frosted eyebrows.

“Bill Pearce, he do say they be red—rosy red, like maids’ cheeks,” Rideout continued, “an’ Sammy Arnold do tell me they be green.”

“The ign’rance o’ these Shore folk!” Eleazar exclaimed. “Some be red and some be green, b’y. Sure, I see both to St. Johns. Oranges, b’y, be yellow.”

Rideout was cramped and numb in the legs. He stood up to swing his arms and stamp his feet.

THE BREATH OF THE NORTH
Eleazar, gaunt and frowning, tirelessly plied the scull.

“Do be a little thing t’ sin for,” said Rideout, when he had taken up his oars again.

“Huh!” Eleazar sniffed. “Ol’ Eve! The serpent tempted she! Huh!”

“Sure,” said Rideout, dully.

Eleazar let the scull swing idle, and turned his face to the North. He was old, but rugged as a weather-beaten rock. They who live in the North abide in the shadow of mystery; they dwell on the frontier of the habitable places of the earth. For a moment, Eleazar felt the oppression of the proximity of an unknown beyond. It may be said that the North, in its depths, is like bleak night, which is the lair of death; and from its inaccessible parts—from the still, rayless waste of it—proceed great winds and frost, before which living things cannot long stand. They who live in the dusk of the borderland live by grace of heavy courage. In the days of the light’s slow decline, they stand, as Eleazar, and gaze into the night of the North, passing, in the space of a breath, up through the miles they have dared in the hopeful

THE WAY OF THE SEA

strength of Summer, to the white lands they have seen; and they perceive a measureless, uncompassionate force unloosed and advancing. In light is compassion, in sunshine compassion; but the chasm between the frost of night and compassion is infinite in its depth and width. So they who live in the North—in the shadow of its frown—within reach of its marauding forces; they who maintain the sovereignty of the race to the edge of the uninhabitable, live in dread of the enemies thereto driven—Night, Solitude and Cold. Eleazar turned from the North with a spirit oppressed.

“’Twill be barb’rous cold,” said he.

“’Tis barb’rous cold, skipper,” said Rideout.

Eleazar filled his pipe. He let the match burn to the butt for the warmth in the blaze. Rideout enviously observed it flaring between the old man’s hands. When it went out he shivered.

“Has you got moare matches, Eleazar?”

“Iss, sure—seven.”

“’Twas eight you had, Eleazar.” This was said reproachfully.

“Iss—eight.”

Eleazar puffed with something of the dare-devil

THE BREATH OF THE NORTH
in his manner. He had not put a pipe in his mouth and escaped the charge of unrighteousness in ten years; and he had often challenged it. He busied himself with the running gear to avert the attack.

“Pass the axe aft again, b’y,” he commanded.

“’Tis a match gone t’ waste,” said Rideout, having obeyed.

The boat was listed with the weight of the sail. The canvas was stiff, sheathed with ice. Fog had congealed on the ropes; they were thick and hard with a coating of ice. Eleazar laboured with all until the sail swung free through a foot or more. He could manage the punt with that in a light wind; but she would not live in half a gale.

“’Tis a great waste in a lifetime,” said Rideout.
“’Tis as much, I ’low, as a quintal o’ fish.”

Eleazar observed that the boat was sunk an inch with her load of ice. There was a hint of wind in the air—a strange hint of snow, even in that sharp cold. It puzzled Eleazar; he looked abroad, but the fog was impenetrable. Rideout was swinging back and forth on his ice-laden oars in a dead way. He was shivering all the while, and there was little strength in his stroke, nothing more than the force

THE WAY OF THE SEA

of his weight. Eleazar supplied to the scull the strength lost to the oars.

“ ’Tis a poor use t’ put un to, b’y,” Rideout said, thickly. “ ’Tis as much as a quintal o’ fish.”

“ Up, b’y, an’ warm yourself,” Eleazar answered, sharply.

“ ’Tis as much as a season’s culling—in a life time.”

“ Up, b’y!”

Rideout wrenched his boots free, and stood up. His feet were numb; he tottered—stayed himself with a grip of the mast. Then he kicked the barrel of flour until his feet tingled. To what enduring advantage? The cold fills the uttermost parts of the universe. It is inexhaustible. Stars blaze in it, disturbing it; but blazing suns are transient, infinitesimal. Night and cold are of all time. Rideout beat himself with his long arms; thus, violently, he stirred his blood and replenished the inward fires. Again, to what enduring advantage? The cold is unwavering and eternal; it is infinite in its evil power and patience. Through time it extinguishes suns and freezes the heavenly systems. The man swung his arms again. The inward fires

THE BREATH OF THE NORTH
flared; he sat down to his labour cheered. The cold is insidious; it returned, creeping; it soon possessed his feet again, advanced, chilled his heart, numbed his instinct of peril, made ready to cast the drowsy spell. But he steadily laboured at the oars; and Eleazar plied the scull. Thus the punt made way while the dusk fell and the Great Wind swept through the forest to the feet of the inland hills.

“Do be a sinful waste o’ matches,” Rideout mumbled.

The cold was stinging. The fading light gave it new bitterness. To Eleazar it was like a pain suffered near to the limit of endurance. Rideout was past the pangs of it; the old man was to him as a gnarled old tree is to a tender sapling. Eleazar’s left hand was numb; he felt himself to be on the verge of the chill that presages collapse. The heat generated by his exertion grew less as weariness spread over him. It was then fast absorbed. His clothes, soaked in the lop off the Cape, hours before, froze, as he stood, so that it was hard for him to change his position.

“Iss, b’y,” the old man answered, after a long time.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

Rideout soon let one oar slip from his grasp. This was a confession of exhaustion. It is a shameful thing in the North. In a dazed way he shifted the blade to the gunwale and there let it rest. Then he took both hands to the other oar. Eleazar accommodated his stroke to this new loss. Through the long grey dusk he sculled on with his purpose fixed steadily on a point hidden in the mist ahead.

“I ’low ’tis under the alder bushes . . . t’ Needle Rock,” said Rideout. “Iss, girl, they do be violets now t’ the Needle Rock.”

The hint of wind fretted Eleazar—that haunting hint of wind with snow. He stopped sculling; stood motionless, with lifted face and expanded nostrils, thus submitting his instinct to all the impressions abroad in the air. He tried the sail. Rope and block were frozen stiff; it was immovable. He looked at Rideout; then, alone, he tried to lift the mast from its socket. It was frozen fast in its place; nor would it yield to his blows. He put the axe where he could catch it up at the first sign of a squall. He began to scull again.

“Handy t’ Mad Mull,” said Rideout. “Sure,

THE BREATH OF THE NORTH
the juniper berries an' the green trees. . . . 'Tis
the bait horn, Eleazar!"

New ice had been added to the boat's weight. She was loggy and low. It was forming fast on her every part. But the sea on all sides was of the same long, oily, black swell.

"I'll help you on the flake, Cousin 'Melia," said Rideout. "The maids do all be out. Woan't you——"

"Hut, b'y!" cried Eleazar.

"Iss," said Rideout.

Eleazar fingered over the broken rock lying loose in the bottom of the boat. He piled the bits anew and deftly. The very soot that befouled them told of how the toil and hardship of unnumbered days had been cheerily lightened. From a compartment under the stern seat, as snug as oakum could make it, Eleazar took some sheets of birch rind, which he shredded and put on the stones, adding some splinters of pine. The match flared, burned steadily, and was touched to the birch. The blaze caught the tissue, sung and crackled; it wound itself through the pine splinters, fired them, rose, leaping and strong, and lighted the gloom red. It

THE WAY OF THE SEA

crackled louder, it licked the new pine with greed, it flamed higher; it shot sparks out into the cold as though in spiteful challenge. Eleazar suspended the kettle over it, and added more fuel. He worked the scull while the ice in the kettle melted and simmered and boiled; then put a handful of tea in the kettle, and took the scull again. The fragrant steam floated about him; the little fire roared and crackled and glowed, and irradiated the enveloping fog. This tiny, leaping flame, while it had life, mocked the dusk and the cold, which are continuous to the infinite; and it radiated courage as it radiated light. Rideout gulped his share of the tea; and when the light of recovery shone in his eyes, he knocked the idle oar from the ice that held it, like the true man that he was, and plied them both. But when the fire had burned itself out, to the last red coal, it was night; the men in the punt had crawled over a league and more of heaving sea, and the younger had again collapsed.

“Huh!” Eleazar grunted, suddenly.

There was the sound of water, lapping. The man at the scull swung his massive, tireless body

THE BREATH OF THE NORTH
back and forth. Soon some great mass loomed
white in the fog—a high, threatening mass of
ice.

“I ’low,” Eleazar thought, “he’ve drifted a
mile nor’-east from where he were to in the
marnin’.”

The punt altered her course in response to long
sweeps of the scull. With a sight of this berg—
derelict in the Bay since midsummer—Eleazar had
his bearings; but the sea has no paths, and the
night was thick before him. He swerved the punt’s
prow until the homing instinct that abides in the
men of that coast was satisfied; then he pressed on
with strong strokes, unfaltering, persuaded that
the tickle to the harbour basin, which leads between
the Pillar and the Staff, lay, ultimately, straight
ahead. It was the hint of wind that fretted him—
the unaccountable hint of wind with snow, sweeping
into a dead, freezing mist. The punt was too low
for a lop—too loggy; a ripple would threaten her
with swamping, and new ice was continuously forc-
ing her deeper. The calm, continuing cold in the
face of that strange threat of snow, became as
though charged with mystery. Eleazar had never

THE WAY OF THE SEA

been one of those who fear the night for the shapes it may hide; yet—he was disquieted. He pressed on. The punt made slow headway; for Rideout's strength was at the expiring point. Eleazar steadied himself and gave greater force to his strokes. The punt surged forward; her frothy wake stretched back into the darkness. The man's store of strength suffered by his mighty draught; it was inevitable that it should be exhausted soon—and beyond was the end. Soon, he was depleting the reserve. It was then that his perception of the things of the mist and the sea was dulled; a flash of white, and a deep, muffled tone, like the beating of a drum in the distance, escaped his senses—and a black mass, as though overhanging, high in the air, was unobserved.

The punt no longer felt the long sweep of the sea; the mighty, gentle lift and sinking had subsided.

“Jim, b'y!”

Rideout's response was too faint to carry the length of the boat.

“Jim, b'y!”

“Iss,” faintly.

THE BREATH OF THE NORTH

Eleazar felt the approach of a great wind. He felt that the wind was near at hand. Rideout abandoned one oar and devoted his strength to the other.

"They be a gale—on—us," Eleazar gasped. "Pull, b'y!"

Rideout awakened at the call.

A portentous ripple came grinning over the black water. There was now audible the hiss of breaking water. This was the foreshadow of an overwhelming peril—the peril of the lop to a laden boat. Eleazar looked at his frozen sail. He reached for his axe, then withdrew his hand; mast and sail were precious as many fish, safely salted and dried. There was no wind—not the sigh of a weary breeze; yet, from the mist, those portentous ripples came, growing, until the sound of their lapping at the punt's prow was fearsome as the snapping of teeth in a dark forest. They forewarned of wind. A ripple grew to a wave in the darkness to starboard; it broke, and Eleazar's eye caught the flash of the foam. Bow on, there was a flash of white; to port, a sharp, thin hiss. A ripple—the mere child of a wave—ran the length

THE WAY OF THE SEA

of the boat; amidships it rose above the gunwale and splashed over. A second splashed over. The punt did not respond. She was sunk low—she had no buoyancy. A third wave splashed over—and a fourth!

“Jim, b’y, is you able t’ bail?”

Rideout did not respond; so Eleazar took the axe and reeled forward.

“Jim! Jim! Is you dead, b’y?”

Rideout was asleep; the oar, dragging in the water, but retarded the punt’s way. Eleazar moved upon the barrel of flour, jealous of its weight; his feet were as though dead, he stumbled and fell. He recovered himself and made ready to strike in the head of the barrel—to cast away the flour! Then he caught sound of a shrill, weird moan. It came out of the distance—out of the heights. Was there wind overhead? Wind fanned his cheek—a descending, swirling wind; flakes of snow fluttered past him. The shriek of high wind sounded in the heavens to the right—sounded with ghostly significance out of hidden space. Sudden, shrill, it repeated itself to the left, with a swish as of lashed shrubs; and it seemed to the man

THE BREATH OF THE NORTH

that the winter wind was fretting a ghostly forest, high up in the night. Flakes of snow sank silently to the sea. Eleazar looked around and above. His eye caught a point of light in the distance over the bow; it was like a little star, set low in the sky. Was the fog lifting? He looked around again. The environing space felt familiar; he had floated there, in the night, before. He had been there—he knew it. Where was that section of space? Was it to the north or to the south of the tickle? Was it off Mad Mull? Was it near the breakers of the Tailor's Nose? He fought hard to find himself. A second light flashed into strong life. It was near at hand—over the port quarter—yellow and dull.

“Huh!” said Eleazar.

The wind came over the Pillar and swept high above the harbour basin to the Staff; it beat upon the one and raged over the other, and went screaming down the coast. The harbour water trembled. The troubled waters of the open sea, behind, stirred it.

“Ahoy, Malachi Rideout!”

“Ahoy!” muffled, from the hill.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"Show a light to the stage, b'y," Eleazar cried.
"'Tis too thick t' land."

Eleazar's homing instinct had brought him safe to port. With the light in the window of Skipper Jarge's little hut on the slope of the Man-o'-War and the lamp in his own cottage for bearings, he made the stage before Malachi Rideout could carry the lantern over the uncertain flake.

"You be t' hoame, Eleazar," Malachi observed.

"Iss," Eleazar responded. "Jim, b'y, up with you! 'Tis noa place for a spell here, b'y." To Malachi: "Drap the rope for the barr'l, b'y. Us'll haul un in the stage. It c'n bide there 'til marnin'. Lively, now!" To Jim: "Up, b'y—out o' the way!"

Rideout crawled up on the stage, with the help of a hand from Malachi, and lumbered blindly up the hill.

"Eleazar!" This was in the voice of Eleazar's wife.

"Iss, woman?"

"Has you fetched the flour?"

"Iss, wife—an' a ball o' twine for the rent in the salmon net."

THE BREATH OF THE NORTH

The barrel was stowed away in the stage. Eleazar's wife appeared at the door.

"They be caplin for supper," said the woman. "Sure, I been kapin' them warm ag'in when youse 'ud get t' hoame."

Eleazar smiled in his beard. Caplin? Hot caplin and a mess of bruise? The water ran out of his teeth in a flood!

The great storm from the North—the wind that swept furiously out of the unknown and laid waste the wilderness—burst over Ragged Harbour, belated, as the door closed behind Eleazar. It made the little cottage under the hill shiver and shake; but it could not lift it from its place, for Eleazar had builded, with cunning and forethought, that house for a *home*. It made the sea to rage—gave the waters irresistible power; but no man of the coast was on the sea in those hours: the sound of the breakers lulled Jim Rideout to sleep, where he lay beside the fire. If the soul of man might interpret the song of the wind, this was the song it sang: *I am the Wind of the North! Swift I come from the Waste of Death. Out of Silence*

THE WAY OF THE SEA

and Solitudes vast and the Whiteness of Snow I sweep. From the Night of the North I steal with Gaunt Death in my train; and I ravage the Seas of the North, and I gather me Sons of Men. . . . I am the Wind of the North! When I play I weave shrouds. Of fine snow I weave shrouds for the bodies of men. I lift it, and sift it, and drift it; and, in sport, I weave shrouds of thin snow for the bodies of men. In my dreams they lie stark on the breast of the North. On the white breast of the North they lie shrivelled and blue, wound with shrouds of fine snow. Yes, I dream of the bodies of men—of the bodies of millions of men; and, in sport, I weave shrouds of thin snow! . . . I am the Wind of the North! Swift I steal from the Waste of Death. Out of Silence and Solitudes vast and the Whiteness of Snow I creep. From the Night of the North I sweep with Gaunt Death in my train; when the hosts of the Sun—the red hosts of the Sun—yield me rest from their torment, I come; and I ravage the lands that they leave, and I gather me Sons of Men. That was the vaunting song the Wind of the North sang over the cottage of Eleazar Manuel.

THE BREATH OF THE NORTH

"Has you got the wood in, b'y?" This was Eleazar. The smoke from his pipe filled the room.

Young Tommy looked up from his little schooner. "Ith, zur," said he, "a hape o' sticks."

"Enough on un t' last two days?"

"Ith, zur. Sammy Arnold he do say 'tis t' starm for three days."

"Do the goaats be t' the shed?"

"Ith, zur—aal. An' the kid have hurt his foot!"

The old man drew a long sigh of content. Eleazar's wife put more wood in the stove. The flames roared up the chimney. Supper was now cleared away. Granny Manuel's spinning-wheel buzzed. Jim snored lustily.

"'Tis a cold night," said Eleazar.

The spirit of mischief entered the mind of Eli, the baby. He sent his pebbles rattling over the floor with a sweeping blow of his chubby fist; and such a clatter they made as they bounded broadcast toward the chicken coop that the dog leaped out of the way, and the cat arched her back and spat indignantly.

"G-g -g-oo-oo!" the baby gurgled.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

Young Jim Rideout raised himself on his elbow and guffawed. Such a face did he make that the baby clapped his hands and crowed. Thereupon, old Eleazar took his pipe from his mouth and exploded into laughter also. What with Tommy's shrill laughter and the buzz of Granny Manuel's spinning-wheel and the cluttering of the chickens and the cat's prolonged manifestations of indignation and the roars of Eleazar and young Jim, Aunt Martha's tin-pans were shaken from the shelf; and the cottage was shaken anew by the merriment inside. Thus, the voice of the Wind of the North and the song that it sang, and the blackness of night, and the cries of the whipped pines on the hill, and the raging of the sea, were all as terrors long lost in time and distance.

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These things mock you, Wind of the North: The wool on sheep's backs at the shearing time, and, through the time of the short, white days, the cunning hands of women—the swift, tireless hands of old women at the loom. A turf hut in a cleft of rock mocks you; and the red sparks that fly upward from chimneys of stone—and flash and

THE BREATH OF THE NORTH
crackle and die—they mock you while they have
life. A little stove and a heap of hewn wood mock
you; and dried fish and steam from a kettle make
light of your boasting. And, O Wind of the
North, the rosy cheeks of children mock you
through all the lands of the North! Though you
sweep from the very Waste of Death—from the
night, silent and hidden—though you come with
Gaunt Death in your train to ravage the Sea and
the Land, these things mock you.

CONCERNING BILLY LUFF AND
MASTER GOODCHILD

Chapter V

CONCERNING BILLY LUFF AND MASTER GOODCHILD

RAGGED HARBOUR is cut off from the surging progress of these days by the great waste which encompasses it. Long, long ago, the forebears of its folk strayed into a by-path; and the succeeding generations have been left behind and forgotten. They concern themselves not at all with inventions and new philosophies, for both are far beyond the reach of their ears and their imaginations: as, for example, they still use the spinning-wheel and wonder what the colour of the flames of hell may be. Indeed, their religion is their comfort and relaxation; when they get it, as the folk say, their joy is surpassing great; while they lack it and long for it they abide in wretchedness. The conversion of little Billy Luff, of that place, was accomplished when he was eight years old, which was the season before he

THE WAY OF THE SEA

first went regularly to the Mad Mull fishing grounds to keep the head of his father's punt up to the wind. The time through which the dreamy, timid, raw-nerved child "wrestled" for salvation was long and bitter. Who shall have the hardness of heart to display the separate agonies of that little soul—the heavy, darkened days—the flaming terrors of the night—the hideous dread and expectation overhanging? It is enough to say that Billy Luff emerged into a quaint complacency; that thereafter his outlook was unperturbed, his little course steadfast—in the spreading of fish, in the care of his father's punt, in all the duties of children, it was quite steadfast.

"He'll make a preacher," said Eleazar Manuel, the ruling elder, to Billy Luff's mother.

The woman laid her hand on her heart. "Oh," she cried, joyfully, "does you think so, honest an' true, Eleazar?"

"Sure, I thinks the Lard's called un to it," said Eleazar.

"I be feared t' think it," she whispered, "but I been prayin' for it these three weeks."

"Mark my wards, he've a call, sure enough,"

CONCERNING BILLY LUFF

said Eleazar, with a nod and a wise wink, as though the Lord had let him into the secret.

Whereupon Billy Luff's mother redoubled her watchful care of the child.

Billy's conversion is recorded as the supreme achievement of the parson from Round Harbour, whose discourse on the latter end of the wicked, delivered, upon that occasion, when the vibrant voice was lifted above a gusty night wind and the roar of the Black Rock breakers, is remembered to this day for the fruit it bore.

"He'm a powerful preacher, that one," Eleazar Manuel was wont to say. "'Twere a wonderful vict'ry t' convict that wee child o' sin."

But there was a little book in Ragged Harbour—a lone, tattered, broken-backed, greasy little story-book for children; its edges were frayed, and it was spotted yellow on almost every page, but it was not musty, for it was the only story-book in Ragged Harbour. The honour of Billy Luff's salvation and continuance in grace and good works must be ascribed in part to it. It was written long, long ago, at the time, as I have said,

THE WAY OF THE SEA

when the forebears of the folk strayed up that forbidding coast in chase of the fish, and it had descended to Billy from the foster-mother of his grandfather, who had brought it from the West Country when she was a little maid. Between its ragged covers were stories and pictures—most entertaining and profitable stories, marvellous pictures. Billy's imagination hungered for stories; so he loved that little book. He was never so happy as in those twilight hours when his mother found time to read to him; when he sat all alone with her in the evening light, close to the window, and looked over the harbour water to the far-away distance, where the great hills were melting with the night.

"'Tis terrible sad in spots," he would say, when she closed the book. It may be that he would have to wipe his eyes with the sleeve of his jacket.

"Iss," she would say, "but 'tis terrible wise, too."

This treasured little volume was called "Early Piety." As the title-page runs, it contained the memoirs of many eminently religious children, interspersed with familiar dialogues, emblematical pictures, prayers, graces, and hymns. "My dear

CONCERNING BILLY LUFF

young reader," says the author, "this little book is written with a design and a desire at once to profit and please you; by showing, in the examples of children, many of whom died young (and you, too, my dear child, may die *very* young), the great happiness and advantage of real and early Piety." Billy Luff loved the stories of these pious and amiable children. "The Sabbath-Breaker Reclaimed; or, The Pleasing Story of Thomas Brown," delighted him. But, best of all, he liked to have his mother read about the most pious and amiable child in the book. This was in the story called "The Entertaining History of Master Billy and Miss Betsy Goodchild." The piety and amiability of these children was not to be exceeded; their dutiful behaviour in the establishment of Mrs. Lovegood, who frequently indulged them with useful pieces of knowledge, when they were good, was complete; their contempt for the things of this life, their longing for the release of death, threw parents and teachers into raptures.

"I wisht I was 's pious an' am'able 's Master Billy Goodchild," thought Billy Luff.

So the amiable children of the book were Billy

THE WAY OF THE SEA

Luff's heroes. They were more worthy of respect and emulation, he perceived, than even Job Luff, his uncle, who had none of the loveliness of piety, but could lift a barrel of pork and drink from the bunghole, if he cared to. Their lives had been lofty, sacrificial, beautiful; for that reason he loved them. He rejoiced in their early salvation; he wept beside their neat, white deathbeds, wept hot tears; he hearkened to their last declarations with a full heart. Indeed, he longed to live a life as eminently pious as their lives had been. With his whole heart, he longed to die a glorious death, even as they had died. In particular, he sought to emulate Master Goodchild in all that he did. It was difficult, to be sure. Master Goodchild, for instance, went cheerfully to bed at precisely seven o'clock; there was never a time when he was required to cut the heads off slippery cod until midnight; nor did the amiable child know what it was to keep the head of a slimy punt up to the wind when half a gale from the nor'east made the spume fly.

"Wisht I could be so good 's he," thought Billy.

These children died young. So Billy wished

CONCERNING BILLY LUFF

that he, too, might die young. In that event, he was sure, his death would be glorious, for, in his day-dreams, he had planned it all out.

“ I’ll say, ‘ Prepare t’ meet your God,’ just afore I dies,” he dreamed, with a chuckle, “ an’ maybe ’twill convert Uncle Job.”

It was one small part of Billy Luff’s day’s work to spread his father’s fish to dry on the flake, and to keep watch, lest the sun burn it or a vagrant shower soak it; and, sometimes, it may be, when he would straighten up to rest his back, he would catch sight of young Joshua Rideout roaming the sunlit Head, leaping from rock to rock, rolling over the stubby grass. Then he would look about, from the hills to the hills and to the glistening edge of the world, and long to be free and far away—not to look for juniper berries, but to lie on his back in the sun, high above the sea, and weave long stories with the wool he gathered in his dreams. But he was steadfast, was Billy, and he would repeat, just as Master Goodchild did,

*I must not idle all the day,
Lest Satan get me for his prey,*

THE WAY OF THE SEA

and bend over the fish again, being more careful than ever to have them flat on the spruce boughs.

In the twilight of hot days, when the fish had gone from the grounds and all the lads of the harbour were foot-free and merry, they would call to him from Uncle Simon's wharf-head to be away with them in the punt to Squid Cove for a lark. But, it may be, he would hear the rattle of tin cups and a kettle floating up with the call of his name; then he would fear that they were bent on plundering ol' Bill Bull's lobster traps, which are set in the waters of Squid Cove. So he would continue the splitting of billets of birch wood for the winter's store; repeating, just as Master Goodchild did when tempted:

*It is a sin to steal a pin,
Much more to steal a greater thing.*

The song and cry and laughter would drift back through the misty shadows, and he would listen, enraptured, while the liquid sounds went echoing into the far, deep silence of the wilderness.

When the great fall winds swept the sea, and

CONCERNING BILLY LUFF

all the men folk were idle—when the harbour water froze in one glassy, solid sheet, and the young folk were out with sleds and wooden skates, making sport and laughter until the hoary old hills grew tired of mocking—when the lads and maids decked themselves out in fantastic fashion and went mummering from cottage to cottage at Christmas tide—when spring came, with the ice still clinging to the coast, and the lads played at “h’ist-your-sails-an’-run” among the boulders of the hillside, which the afternoon flooded with warm sunshine: at such times Billy Luff set his lips, and turned for strength to the Little Verses for Very Good Children, just as Master Goodchild did. He would repeat,

*I must not waste my time in play,
For time is precious, wise folk say,*

and set himself to the acquirement of some useful piece of knowledge, such as the knowledge with which Mrs. Lovegood was accustomed to indulge Master Goodchild when he had been most conspicuously good.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

He was steadfast, was Billy.

One afternoon in spring, when school was out, the lads bounded, whooping, down the rocky hillside to the edge of the water. The harbour was spread with fragments of ice, floating free, which a barrier of standing ice at the narrows kept imprisoned.

"Come on copyin', Billy," said Ezekiel Sevier.

That is a game of follow-my-leader over the broken ice, every cake of which, it may be, sinks under the weight of a lad. It is a training for the perilous work of seal hunting, which comes later in the life of a Newfoundlander.

"Me mother said I weren't t' goa," said Billy. He looked wistfully over the ice-strewn water.

"'Tis better not, then," said Ezekiel.

"When you grows up you'll be sorry you didn't l'arn t' copy when you was a b'y," said little Skipper Jo. "Sure, b'y, when you goas huntin' swiles, an' you gets out on the ice, an' the ice goas abroad, what you goain' t' do? Sure, b'y," he added, sagely, "you're brung up too tender. Me mother says you didn't ought t' wear a undershirt

CONCERNING BILLY LUFF

an' two pair o' socks. Me mother says you didn't ought t' be brung up like a girl."

"I isn't a girl," Billy flashed.

"Noa," said Jo, "but you didn't ought t' be brung up like one."

"Sure, b'y," cried Ezekiel, "he've not t' goa swilin' (sealing) when he grows up. 'Tis a parson *he's* t' be."

"Iss, sure," said Jo; "but——"

"I s'pose you thinks, Billy Luff, 'tis wicked t' copy," sneered Joshua Rideout. This boy envied Billy the Lord's call to be a parson. He, too, wanted to be a parson, and wear slippers, and have the folk send goat's milk and potatoes and the fattest salmon to him.

"Noa, an' I doan't," said Billy Luff. Then he repeated to himself, just as Master Goodchild did when he felt his ire rising:

I must not be a wicked child;

I must be always meek and mild.

"I s'pose you thinks Ezekiel Sevier 'll goa t' hell for it," said Joshua, edging nearer.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"Noa, an' I doan't," said Billy.

"I s'pose you thinks Skipper Jo 'll goa t' hell," said Joshua.

Joshua's intention was plainly belligerent. Billy Luff had to repeat to himself, most earnestly, even while his fists closed:

*I must not curse and swear, or fight ;
I must be good with all my might.*

"Noa, an' I doan't," he said, aloud.

Joshua strutted up to Billy. He was scowling, and his closed fists were behind his back. He put his face close to Billy's.

"I s'pose," he said, passionately, "you thinks God 'll damn *me*."

Billy Luff was conscious of a rising impulse to strike that flat nose such a blow that the quivering nostrils would be still. His fist itched to plant itself just on the tip. He drew himself up until he was almost as tall as Joshua.

"God 'll damn you, certain sure," he said, steadily. "An' I hopes he do."

"Does you? Does you? Does you?" said

CONCERNING BILLY LUFF

Joshua, dancing about like an Indian. "I'd give you a beatin' if I—if I—if I didn't have t' goa home an' feed the goaats."

"You's scared, you bay-noodie!" Billy taunted.

"Is I? Is I? Is I?" Joshua screamed. "You bide a bit an' I'll give you such a barb-rous beatin' as you never had."

"You's scared! You's scared!"

"Is I? Is I scared? I got t' goa. There's me mother singin' out for me now."

Thereupon Joshua ran away.

Now, Billy Luff knew full well that he had committed grievous sin; that he had yielded to a temptation over which Master Goodchild had never failed to triumph. So he ran off home all alone, lest he should burst out crying on the way, and so further shame his faith. The weight of his iniquity pressed heavily upon him. He went to his bedroom and wept bitterly. After a while, he dried his eyes and sat himself at the window in the sitting-room—the broad window, overlooking the harbour, where there is a view of the misty hills, and the dusk may be watched as

THE WAY OF THE SEA

it creeps out of the wilderness. He looked out; but his eyes were not upon the hills, nor did he see the shadows coming. He was thinking of a picture—the third picture in the “Entertaining History of Master Billy and Miss Betsey Goodchild,” which portrays Master Patience dreaming over his Bible, quiet as a lamb, as ’tis said, and so happy because he is content to wait until next year for some pretty things his guardian has promised him; portrays, also, Master Passion, who beats the cherry-tree with a cruel stick because he has stubbed his toe against the root.

“Now, b’y,” said Billy’s mother, bustling in from the kitchen, “I’ll read you a bit while the fish is b’ilin’, for bein’ such a good b’y, an’ comin’ straight hoame from school.”

“Iss, mum,” said Billy.

She sat down beside him, and held the little book up to the failing light. “What’ll I read, b’y?” she said. “Master Goodchild’s tale about ‘A Very Good little Girl who died Very Happy before she was Seven Years old’?”

“Noa, mum.”

“‘A Pretty History of a Very Pious Young

CONCERNING BILLY LUFF

Lady, well Worthy the Imitation of my Little Readers ’? ’

“ Noa, mum,” said Billy.

“ What then? ” said she.

“ ‘ Containin’ the Hist’ry of a Sad Wicked Child, an’ his Miserable Death,’ ” said Billy.

So she read it to him. It is the story of Jack Perverse, related by Master Goodchild to a pious little company, whom he had entertained at dinner; and it concludes this way:

“ ‘ Naughty girls and boys are punished, as well as naughty men and women,’ concluded Master Goodchild, ‘ and you may well believe this; for *Jack Perverse*, one Sunday afternoon, after he had been making game of the minister, went with a boy of his acquaintance, as bad as himself, to wash in the river, and there he, getting out of his depth, and the other being seized with a cramp, were both drowned; and so taken away suddenly with all their sins unrepented of and unforgiven, to stand before the judgment. Thus we see, my dear companions, that the way of sin is *down hill*; and how children are hurried on from *one crime* to *another*, till all ends in the ruin of *soul and body*.’ ”

THE WAY OF THE SEA

“ ‘ May we all be kept,’ said the little pious company, ‘ from all the ways of sin, and the *least appearance of evil!* ’

“ Then they sang the following pretty hymn :

*“ When children in their wanton play,
Serv’d old Elisha so,
And bid the prophet go his way,
‘ Go up, thou bald-head, go,’*

*“ He quickly stopped their wicked breath,
And called two raging bears,
That tore them limb from limb to death,
With blood, and groans, and tears.”*

“ ‘ Amen!’ said the little pious company, with one voice.”

That night, while his mother was tucking him up in bed, Billy Luff made confession of his fall from grace.

“ The Devil got the best o’ me the day, mum,” he said.

She looked up, startled.

“ Iss, mum,” said Billy ; “ I were handy t’ swat-tin’ Joshua Rideout on the nose.”

CONCERNING BILLY LUFF

“The great, hulkin’ dunce!” she cried. “Did un beat you, b’y?”

“Noa, mum,” said Billy. “He didn’t dast. He run away.”

She clucked and cluttered like a wrathful hen. She would attend to Joshua Rideout, said she. She patted the bedclothes, and tucked and tucked, and patted again. Then she kissed him good-night, and took up the candle to go.

“’Tis sad t’ think o’ the miserable death o’ them b’ys,” said Billy.

“But they was so wicked,” said she.

“Oh-h,” he said, solemnly, “they was fair wicked—t’ mock the parson the way they done! But ’tis sad t’ think they was cut off in sin.”

She kissed him again. Again she moved to go; but she paused, that she might feast her heart on the sight of him, lying there in bed.

“Is you feared o’ the dark the night, b’y?” she asked, tenderly.

“Noa, mamma,” said Billy. “Jesus is near.”

In a transport of pride and joy, she set the candle down, and hugged him close; and she kissed him a hundred times. Then she had to do the

THE WAY OF THE SEA

tucking up all over again. At last, she clattered down to her work; and she was very happy.

But little Billy dreamed all night long about Hell.

Now, it may be that Billy Luff's bringing up had been too tender for the child of a stock so hardy. However that be, he did not long survive the wearing of the undershirt and two pair of socks. One day, in the school recess, when, by special permission, he went copying over the ice, he fell in the water. Lest he should lose some useful piece of knowledge, he determined to sit in his wet clothes until school was let out. So, that night, he was cold and fevered by turns; and he was very sick when he was put to bed.

"I'se sick, mamma," he said, for the hundredth time. "I'se sick here," he whimpered, laying his hand on his chest. "It hurts me barb'rous."

"Hush-h!" she crooned, bending over him. "Take this, dear; 'twill make you all better the morrow."

He gulped the homely remedy down with a wry face; then he fell back on the pillow.

CONCERNING BILLY LUFF

"'Tis wonderful nasty," he sighed.

"Goa t' sleep!" she said, softly. "Goa t' sleep!"

"But I took un brave enough," said he.

She smoothed the hair back from his brow. Her hand was all rough and stained; but it was very tender.

"Goa' sleep! Hush-h-h! Goa t' sleep!"

"Iss, mamma."

But he could not fall asleep.

The folk of Ragged Harbour set great store by the last words of the dying. Was the death triumphant? they ask of those who have been favoured to see and to hear. Was it hopeless? they inquire; and it may be that their lips twitch while they frame the question. They are a folk exceedingly simple. Alas! some judge the secret past of all passing souls by the words last spoken, and according to these words they impute sin or righteousness, and predict a future of woe or glory. Thus, when it was made known that little Billy Luff's sickness had come near to its end, they wondered concerning the manner of death this

THE WAY OF THE SEA

holy child would die; and they longed to watch and listen by the bed where he lay, lest they should miss some wondrous manifestation of the presence of the Lord God Almighty and Most High.

The age-wise women of the place said that the lad would die at evening.

"Is you all ready t' goa, Eleazar, b'y?" Eleazar Manuel's wife called up the stair of their cottage. "The shadow o' Needle Rock 's near the easter edge o' the roaad. 'Tis time t' be off."

"Noa, I isn't, woman," Eleazar replied, a touch of impatience in his voice. "I'm havin' trouble with the wristbands o' me shirt."

She fluttered up to the bedroom, all dressed out in her meeting-house clothes; and she buttoned the wristbands for Eleazar, and helped him on with his best coat.

"They's noa tellin' what'll happen afore us gets there," she said. "Leave us make haste."

So, in haste, they set out for Billy Luff's home, in a state of delicious excitement, but not heartlessly; and when they came abreast of Solomon Stride's flake, Priscilla, Solomon's wife, came run-

CONCERNING BILLY LUFF

ning down the path to intercept them. She, too, was dressed in her meeting-house clothes.

“Is you goain’ t’ Missus Luff’s?” said she.

“Iss, sure,” said Eleazar. “I be godfather t’ little Billy.”

“He’s a holy child,” said Priscilla, biting at her finger-nails, “an’ ’tis like the Lard’ll send a sign when he dies.”

“Sure, Priscilla,” said Eleazar, “I’m expectin’ a glorious death for that wee child.”

“The Lard’ll send a sign,” muttered Priscilla, looking away. Then she said, quickly: “Does you think Missus Luff’d mind if—if—I went with you?”

“Sure, noa,” said Eleazar’s wife. “Come along o’ we. She’ll be proud t’ have you.”

Thus it was that Priscilla gained her heart’s desire.

“He’s a holy child,” she thought. “The Lard’ll send a sign.”

When they came to Billy Luff’s home they found others there, all lingering in a lower room, waiting. After a time, Mary, a maid-servant, passed through on her way to the kitchen.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

“Is you heered anything yet, Mary?” Eleazar whispered, catching her by the arm.

“Iss, Eleazar,” said Mary; “he’ve said, ‘Jesus loves me.’”

“Have he, now!” exclaimed Eleazar, as in blank amaze.

“Iss,” said Mary; “an’ he’ve said, ‘Prepare t’ meet your God.’”

“Hark t’ that, now!” cried Eleazar. “He’ve said, ‘Prepare t’ meet your God’—an’ him a wee child, dyin’!”

It was borne in upon Eleazar that he, too, must lie on a death-bed, come a day. He bit his lip, and tugged nervously at his beard.

“Think o’ that, now,” he muttered. “‘Prepare t’ meet your God,’ an’ him a wee child!”

Priscilla Stride plucked at his sleeve. “Leave us steal upstairs t’ the door,” she whispered.

“You goa first,” said he.

They stole up the stair to the door to the room where little Billy lay dying, and all the others followed them.

Meantime, in the little room above, where the

CONCERNING BILLY LUFF

child's mother and the parson from Round Harbour sat at the bedside, Billy Luff had passed into that state of consciousness and ease which, in such cases, intervenes between the long, wasting agony and the death. His face was turned to the window; the harbour water lay, all still and sombre, below; beyond the naked rock of the opposite shore rose the spruce-clad summits of the hills; and over all hung a cloudy, glowing sky. He looked out, dreaming, until the untimely silence of the room, and the whispering floating up the stair, and his laboured breathing, frightened him; then he turned his head.

They answered all his questions, concealing nothing.

"I doan't want t' die," he whimpered. "I'm feared t' die."

"Hush!" his mother whispered in his ear; and she kissed his cheek.

He began to cry.

"You isn't goin' t' die! You's t' get well," she sobbed.

But still he trembled. She kept her lips pressed against his cheek, kissing him all the time,

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"I'm feared," he said. "I'm feared."

His mother wrung her hands. The parson prayed even more fervently that a confident, glorious death might be granted unto this child.

"I wants t' stay with you, mamma," he sobbed, reaching out for her hand. "I'm so feared t' die."

Soon, the touch of his mother's hand quieted him; then, in some poor, childish way, he seemed to feel the obligation of dying triumphantly, even as Master Goodchild had.

"Jesus loves me," he whispered.

Again he began to cry; but he set his lips to continue.

"Prepare t' meet your God," he whimpered.

Then he fell silent of weakness. The people, pressing in at the door to watch him, caught his eye. He did not cry any more. Brave little soul that he was, he did not cry any more, lest he should dishonour the faith.

"Jesus is mighty t' save," he said, but so faintly that the ears of Priscilla Stride barely caught the words.

His mother thought to comfort him by reading from the little book he loved so well, not knowing

CONCERNING BILLY LUFF

that death had drawn so near. And so she got the little book, and opened it at the page he loved best of all, whereon is set down Master Goodchild's last letter to his father; and she handed it to the parson to read.

“ ‘Dear and Honoured Sir: The endearing expressions of your love, and kind approbation of my conduct, make me weep with joy, and fire me with a desire to deserve both,’ ” the parson read. “ ‘And I don't know how——’ ”

“ Leave me see the picture first, sir,” said Billy, just as he had always said to his mother.

The mother lifted the child, and the parson held the picture close to his eyes—a rude woodcut of Christ stretching out a saving hand. It comforted Billy, for he thought it beautiful; but he did not see it, nor needed to, for he knew it line by line.

“ ‘And I don't know how to do this better,’ ” the parson continued, reading, “ ‘than by sending you a short account of Master Ridgeway, a most amiable child and dear companion of mine, but now translated to a better country and the best company. When he was only three years of age he discovered evident marks of a work of grace in

THE WAY OF THE SEA

his heart. But the last two years of his life (for he was but five when he died) his piety was even more remarkable, and he ripened apace for glory. When his maid was one day covering him up in his cradle, he said, *In Heaven I shall be covered with the robe of my Redeemer's righteousness.* Just before he died he said: *This is the day of my death; it is a most delightful day.* He called for his sister, to whom he said, *Jesus loves me;* and to his nurse he said, *Prepare to meet your God;* and to the rest he said, *Jesus is mighty to save.* He frequently expressed great joy; till in the evening, a convulsion fit seized him, and proved the rough but welcome messenger sent to convey his happy spirit away. Thus, dear papa, died a young disciple, whose life and death I have no higher wish than to emulate; while I write, I am even wishing to go, too, and sister Betsy joins me in longing to pass through the gates of death into——’ ”

“Hush, parson!” said Billy Luff’s mother; “hush!”

She had watched the child’s interest fade and lapse—his laboured, anguished listening change

CONCERNING BILLY LUFF

into the sweet serenity of one who knows no duty but to trust. She had a shadowy perception of this: that the garment and mask of Master Goodchild had been changed for the pure white holiness of childhood; and now, first, she understood that her boy was lovelier thus robed.

“Hush!” she said again. “He’ve forgot——”

She lifted her lean, misshapen hand. Silence fell: only the sounds of evening drifted in—the rustle of the lilac-bush by the window, which the breeze was rocking and hushing; the crooning twitter, and the far-off, liquid cries, drifting, drifting, floating in from the red and golden glory of the evening. They listened—listened as for some strange, whispered revelation of things hidden.

“Is you here, mother?”

“Iss, laddie,” she whispered.

His fingers wandered feebly over the toil-worn hand he had caught again. They touched the crooked forefinger and passed over the rugged knuckles, feeling of each in turn, until they came to the long, rough scar on the wrist, where they lingered.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"Iss, 'tis you, mamma," he said.

A little smile hovered about his lips. He was looking at the rafters overhead, aimlessly searching the gloom there, smiling all the while. He had forgotten all about Master Goodchild—had forgotten even that he was now to die. He saw the night creep in long before the gloaming shadows gathered over the harbour. Long before the sun lifted its hands from the hills he saw deep night creep in where he lay. But he was not afraid any more; for he held his mother's hand tight, and knew that she would not steal away from him until he had fallen sound asleep.

"The splittin' knife slipped," he said, feeling of the scar on her wrist, "an' he cut you, when you was a little maid, warkin' in your fawther's stage."

She had often told him the story. "Iss," she said; "when I were a wee thing."

"When you wasn't noa bigger'n me," he said. He smiled again at the great mystery of his mother's childhood. "Noa bigger'n me," he muttered. "'Tis so queer!"

CONCERNING BILLY LUFF

He lay quite still, moving only his fingers, which wandered over his mother's hand. Again silence; all a-throb with the rising fret and murmur of the Black Rock breakers.

"You'll not goa down 'til I fall asleep, will you, mamma?"

"Noa, dear."

"I'm sorry you've t' bide here so long, the night; but I can't fall asleep, somehow, an' I'm feared o' the dark." Then, reverting to the scar: "An' it bled a wonderful sight; an' Uncle Job bound un up with a bit o' his new shirt, an' your fawther gave un a sad scoldin' for what he done, didn't um? An' Uncle Job were oan'y a little lad like me."

"Iss," she moaned; "with a bit o' his new shirt, an' he were oan'y a laddie like you."

He laughed, as he had ever done at that story—a clear, joyous laugh, but faint, and ending in a sharp sob. A quiver ran over his body, and then he was at rest again. He sighed, and turned his head. He thought he was falling asleep.

"Good-night."

She bent over and kissed him.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

“Good-night,” he said, again. “But don’t goa, mamma—just yet. I isn’t quite—asleep.”

They waited a long time. The sunset failed and gave way to the dusk. Night covered the harbour water and clothed all the hills with black. The shadows trooped in.

“He’ve fell asleep,” whispered Eleazar Manuel, at the door. “Leave us goa. Sh-h-h-h! Doan’t wake un up.”

Even while they tip-toed out, the parson’s knowing hand stole under the coverlet and crept softly to the lad’s little breast, where it rested, listening.

“Even so, Lord Jesus!” he murmured, lifting up his eyes.

Then a flood of anguish broke from the mother’s heart.

THE LOVE OF THE MAID

Chapter VI

THE LOVE OF THE MAID

I

HE was a man fashioned through generations by those forces which stripped the headlands of Ragged Harbour of all graces, long, long before plastic men were given into their hand. His body was hairy, gaunt, and weather-worn, and it was clothed in goatskin boots and greasy homespun, which he had sewn with his own clumsy hands, in his cabin near the Staff, where he lived alone. Escape the glance of his eyes—unquiet, dry, hot eyes, rimmed with flaring red—which struck from the ambush of ragged brows, and his face was like a graven face, an unearthed fragment, whose fashioning hand might long since have passed from dust through new flesh to dust again. Wind and frost and driven rain, in a conflict of fifty years, had worn his heart to the likeness of some grey old crag of the Newfoundland coast. The crag is set in the van of a

THE WAY OF THE SEA

high cape; it is seamed and crumbling in its outer parts; and in a sheltered crevice, where the mould of years has gathered, the wind by chance drops a seed, which takes root and boldly sprouts. Lo! the crag has the tenderness of a blade of grass. Love of the maid was the living green of his heart: a rank, misshapen growth, true enough, which we must liken to a graceless weed rather than to a flower, as it may appear; for we live in a land where the perfume and splendour of flowers are a commonplace, nor should we stare at a lily or ask the name of a rose.

When the maid was nineteen years old and could lift a barrel of flour, this Elihu Gale was one of two lovers she had.

Two to love the maid? Only two of a people of strength to love the maid who could lift a barrel of flour! Rather, let it be said: Two dared take up with her. The one was rich in punts and nets, the other in brawn and laughter: which latter are more to be desired by maids than cod-traps and schooners when stomachs are full. In truth, it was as though she had the youth of Ragged Harbour tied to her skirts; they hung about her, being care-

THE LOVE OF THE MAID

ful, for sure, to keep their distance, which was the length of her arm, to an inch. Of a Sabbath evening the men folk lingered at the church door until she had passed in; whereupon, to his bewilderment, old Sammy Arnold was left alone in the entry to ring the Lord his just due—the last stroke of three minutes, and a clang more to make sure, for old Sammy had a lively fear of the wrath to come. In short, she was all that is desirable in the sight of men. She was a buxom maid, a plump, hearty, laughing maid, with snapping black eyes and a wealth of red blood—a maid sound in wind and limb, with mighty hands and arms, and a will for work as great as her biceps muscles. Such, then, was she; and when she put on her pink merino gown she thrilled the hearts of men.

“Oh, Lard,” Elihu Gale was wont to groan inwardly, “she do be a clever maid, but she’ve a barb’rous appetite!”

One night in June, when the twitter of mating birds had been in the air the day long, Elihu hid in the shadow of Needle Rock, on the Old Crow Road, where all the love is made; for young Jim

THE WAY OF THE SEA

Rideout, who was sinful mad for the maids, by all the gossip of the harbour, had taken her walking in the dusk. There had been no sign of fish off the harbour, nor above and below, from Round Harbour to the Cape, even so late in the season as this; so Elihu had time for jealous spying, as Rideout had for courting.

“I’ll see un goa by,” thought Elihu Gale. “I’ll speer.”

Now, lovers have ever been loath to leave the dusk of June nights. You may answer why for yourself. However that be, if you have saved your heart from the spoiling touch of the years, you will know, at least, that the dusk of spring is redolent of blossoms and pulsing with love-sighs. Since time was, the men have tricked the maids into lingering where the road is soft to the feet and the shadows lend themselves to all the needs of tender impulses. It was not curious, then, that when young Jim Rideout, returning, came with the maid to Needle Rock, he should wish the Bishop’s Thimble miles away; for the Thimble is that great rock where the turn to the village street is made, and Aunt Phœbe’s windows command the path beyond.

THE LOVE OF THE MAID

Nor, come to think of it, was it curious that he should drop his sinker so soon as he spied the loose end of a spool of thread hanging from the maid's skirt-pocket; for no sooner had he stopped to recover his sinker than he caught the loose end of thread, and no sooner had he tied the thread to a handy twig than he found his sinker. This was not curious at all; but, in the opinion of Elihu Gale, who saw it all, it was a deed that deserved, and would eventuate in, damnation to a fiery lake: which was the best he could make of the situation. For, as Jim strolled along with the maid, they left a trail of white thread, which, as the spool turned, added twice its length to the dusky road. Such was their rapture—such the spell of the balmy solitude and the haze over the harbour water—that the talk of squid and jigging, assuming, here, some strange relation to kissing, was boisterous to the very point of tenderness. Squid and kissing are not akin, as everybody knows; but the dusk is wise in the ways of transforming familiar things, and can even enchant a back yard into a paradise. The difficulty of relating squid and kissing is as nothing.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"Sure," exclaimed Jim, when the spool had come to the end of its two hundred yards, "what be this trailin' astern?"

"Plague it!" the maid ejaculated. "'Tis me thread. Us'll have t' wind un up. Sure, I'll be late t' hoame. Plague it!"

"Plague it!" said young Jim. "Plague it! 'Tis too bad—'tis now. 'Tis caught to a shrub, somewhere sure. Plague it!"

So they went back through deeper dusk, and with slower steps; and the maid wound the thread, and the man talked of squid and kisses. When they came to the handy twig, the maid wound up to the very knot, for she was a thrifty maid, and would not waste so much as an inch of thread; and in the knot she found some deep interest for a time.

"'Tis a clove hitch!" she exclaimed, looking up.

"Iss, sure!" said Jim Rideout, blankly.

The maid gave him a swift glance of suspicion.

"'Tis queer, that," he went on. "Hum! 'Tis the queerest thing I ever knowed."

The maid edged toward him with a twinkle in her eye—a significant glint there, which Jim did

THE LOVE OF THE MAID

not perceive at all, for he was stupidly staring at the knot.

“How do he come here now?” asked the maid, absently. “Who tied un, I wonder?” The twinkle in her eye had spread to her mouth, where a vicious little smile lurked.

“Hum!” said Jim, curiously examining the knot. “’Tis a clove-hitch,” he added, as though convinced against his reason. “They be nar a doubt about it.”

The maid edged closer and extended her right arm behind her. Her under lip was between her teeth.

“Sure, now,” said Jim, scratching his head, “how do he come here? ’Tis past *me*.”

She was bent on something, that maid! She had her eye fixed on Jim’s cheek; and her arm was at its full length, which was not little. She made her foothold firm in the moss, her feet spread apart.

“’Tis the fairies!” said Jim, looking round. “Sure, Aunt Phœbe told me they be noa end o’ fairies t’ the Old Crow Road. ’Tis queer, that!”

The arm of the maid—the long, brawny right arm, which, with its mate, could lift a barrel of

THE WAY OF THE SEA

flour—swung swiftly in a half-circle with an upward curve, and Jim, caught full on the cheek with the open palm, was knocked off his feet.

“ ’Tis a fairy!” roared the maid. “ ’Tis the fairy that tied the clove-hitch.”

She gathered her skirts about her knees and went flying down the road, waking the hills with her laughter; and so fast did she run that one of her robust, red-stockinged legs could not be distinguished from the other.

“ Sure, she loves me!” gasped Jim Rideout.

That blow! Had she been angry? No. The last peal of laughter had not yet ceased to be the shuttlecock of the crags above. It was the sign of love. Elihu Gale, in the shadow of Needle Rock, felt that he was bereft. An old heart new seared! Jim Rideout knew that he was beloved. For a time, he lay on the moss where he had fallen; fearing to stir—even to move his eyes from the depths of the sky where the stars winked at him—lest his rapture should depart. That blow! The swift strength and cunning of it! The playfulness of it! Adorable ’Melia Mary! What bliss to be beloved by such as thou art, O thou merry-

THE LOVE OF THE MAID

hearted one! He dreamed a thousand ecstatic dreams in a flash. For sure, they had to do with lips and eyes. Then he picked himself up and went singing through the night. His heart was aflower with fine impulses. In the fall he would build a house. That a fine impulse! Who, indeed, would build it for him? Could he wed without first building a house? Ah, but he would build a house with a porch. A porch! Can you hang a salmon net to dry on a porch? Nevertheless, he would have a porch. Love had inspired him with the desire. So it was determined; he would build a house with a porch under Quid Nunc, where there was a view of the evening sky through the tickle rocks. The indolent fellow! Must he have a house where he could read the weather signs from his front door? It was not to know the morrow's weather that he desired a sight of the evening sky. Indeed, it was not for that. Have I not said that his heart was aflower with fine impulses? So, he would build his house and wait for the coming of a real parson; and afterward, at odd times he would cover the rocks with earth to make a place for flowers to grow. In ten years he would have a bloom-

THE WAY OF THE SEA

ing garden there. A garden without the house; and within, a garden, O adorable 'Melia Mary—a garden of lads and little maids!

“O Lard,” cried Elihu Gale, emerging from the shadow, making the cry of the prophet a cry to voice his own agony, “O Lard, feed me with apples, stay me with flagons, for I am sick of love!” He had neither seen an apple nor heard of the uses of a flagon, but there was pain in the cry, and beseeching: a cry to voice his own agony, “O Lard, feed me with apples, stay me with flagons, for I am sick of love!”

God pity you, old Elihu Gale!

II

It must now be told how that there came a time when the sea and the cold conspired to set Hunger upon the throne of that coast: a time when Hunger said, “Thus and so shalt thou do,” and thus and so all the people of Ragged Harbour did. Ragged Harbour passed into the shadow of famine: wherein mightily abound all those terrors and afflictions which it is the concern of life to escape. The folk of that remote place are still under the domination

THE LOVE OF THE MAID

of the elements, which in this fruitful, populated land have been subdued, but with which they must watchfully contend, as their remotest ancestors did. The wind bloweth where and with such force as it listeth. Within the knowledge of men, the off-shore gale has never concerned itself with the convenience of the Ragged Harbour fleet. Nor, when it swept Abram Lisson into those mysterious places which lie beyond the limit of vision, did it first pause to discover that a wife and eight children had need of him. The sea, too, vents its infinite humours, raging at will; and, according to its disposition, whether to niggardliness or to plenteous giving, there is food or the lack of it. Wind and sea and fog and cold, with all their kin, follow their inclinations with lofty indifference for the hearts and stomachs of men. Hence, Ragged Harbour keeps watch, and, in all things, so orders its life as to fend off those moods which are dire in their effects: that is the first duty of man. Hence, the things of the soul, which, elsewhere, being uppermost, make for content in every fortune, thriving in the worst, here, in famine, are relegated to insignificance; and a ragged, lean, salt cod may as-

THE WAY OF THE SEA

sume a value high above love and all other delights—as old Elihu Gale well knew.

“ ’Tis a hard lookout for Ragged ’Arbour,” said Eleazar Manuel to Elihu Gale, one midsummer day.

There, Eleazar’s forethought came to an end. Not so with Elihu. From that day he gathered food, seeking everywhere; and he cruelly deprived himself that he might accumulate a store against a certain time. But all he said to Eleazar was:

“ ’Tis that, b’y.”

Through the summer Ragged Harbour subsisted on the tomcod and dories of the harbour water, the trout of the little lake beyond the Man-o’-War, the produce of seven patches of hand-made ground, and the stray salmon which were meshed in the nets off the Mull: all being sufficient. In the fall, the wilderness provided three caribou which had strayed from the path to the south, a plenty of juniper berries, thirteen partridges, and a loon. When the winter threatened, the traders came from the lower outports with flour, pork, molasses, and tea, long faces, and a generous fund of advice

THE LOVE OF THE MAID

concerning the virtue of frugality; but, being wary of bad debts at such times, they could be persuaded to advance on the next season's catch but food sufficient to keep the fire of life burning until the spring break-up, which, they predicted, would be an early one. Then the cold descended from the north: it sealed the harbour and ponds, froze the wilderness, filled the passes with snow, and spread the sea with ice. The people were cut off and locked tight in their place, whereupon they made great fires and proceeded to humour their voracity with what the traders had left; and when it came to March they had eaten their pigs and goats, and were searching in the stages for forgotten stores of dried caplin. When the place seemed to have been swept of food, Eleazar Manuel and Bill Luff followed the coast thirty miles north to Englee. Englee gave freely of its little store to Ragged Harbour, and when Eleazar and Bill got back with the dogs Ragged Harbour shared this relief with Round Harbour, whence in the meantime two men had come through forty miles of snow. Then Ragged Harbour incontinently devoured what was left, and all the stomachs were full to bursting for

THE WAY OF THE SEA

three days. The grubbing for food began over again.

When it had come near to the pass of unclean food or starvation, which was in the beginning of a late spring, Elihu Gale waited for 'Melia Mary on the Lookout path, half way up the hill; and when she came down, he stopped her for a word, for if he were to speak at all he must speak now, before the promised west wind blew.

"Fine even, 'Melia Mary," said he.

Even so simple a phrase was hard to utter calmly, such was the agitation which possessed him, for he knew that the impending moments held the fate of his desire.

"'Tis that, Elihu Gale."

'Melia Mary made as though to pass on; but she was exceeding hungry and weary of the pain, and she craved a word of comfort.

"Do they be sign of a west wind, think you, Elihu?" she asked, hopefully.

"They be noa sign," Elihu answered, with such conviction as made 'Melia Mary stare. "'Tis t' blow from the nor'east for a week."

Ragged Harbour was waiting for the west wind,

THE LOVE OF THE MAID

which should break the rotten in-shore ice and clear the shallows, where the fish lay.

“An’ they were potatoes a-plenty, we wouldn’t care,” said Elihu. He fixed the maid with his red-rimmed eyes.

“Sure, noa,” she sighed.

“An’ they were smoked salmon an’ flour left t’ Ragged ’Arbour,” he went on, giving each word impressive force, “we wouldn’t be hungry.”

She was a robust maid: a large, hearty maid; and her body had suffered deprivation for many days. It now craved clean food as it had never before known desire. She was in an agony of hunger.

“Sure, noa, Elihu,” she murmured.

“An’ they were a quintal o’ fish t’ the stage t’ your hoame, it might blow nor’east for a month an’ you wouldn’t care. Sure, girl,” he added, smacking his lips, “it would be fine with duff, this day—with duff, girl, an’ a bit o’ pork.”

With the words, a mirage took form before the girl: The table was spread; there were butter and white bread and goat’s milk set out; a boiled cod—a great white cod, with duff and pork, and a mess of delicate fishes’ tongues and faces—and a heap

THE WAY OF THE SEA

of yellow potatoes were there; and the steam from the teapot fragrantly drifted about her. She shut her eyes tight, and gritted her teeth, and clenched her hands—all to dissipate this cruel vision; and it was hard to still the clamour now roused within.

“They be,” said Elihu, hoarsely. “They be all they things t’ Ragged ’Arbour.”

“Where be they, Elihu Gale?”

Elihu drew close to whisper. His eyes were flaring under their ragged, grizzled brows.

“They be fish t’ my house,” he said in her ear. “They be fish an’ smoked salmon, an’ flour an’ potatoes. They be fish,” he went on, accenting each item of the list, “half a quintal o’ fish, two smoked salmon, quarter barr’l o’ flour, an’ three bushel o’ potatoes. They be all t’ my hoame,” he said, with his face close to hers. “Fish an’ salmon an’ flour an’ potatoes an’ *tea*.”

She started from him. “’Tis a shame——”

“’Tis noa shame,” he cried. “They be mine. I cotched un, an’ I growed un. I saved un. I went hungry t’ keep un t’ this day. They be noa one has a right to un. They be mine. ’Tis noa shame.”

THE LOVE OF THE MAID

Suddenly she became quiet, and her silence was tragically significant. Then she spoke in a low, eager voice. "Smoked salmon?" she said, while her eyes glistened. "'Tis t' my taste."

"Iss," he said. "They be two left."

"An' tea," she continued, under her breath.

"Iss, an' tea."

The maid gave him a sidelong glance. Were it untouched by greed it had been coy. She looked away. She smacked her lips and spasmodically worked her jaws. Then she looked him full in the face with a smile, which was half-cunning, half-coquettish.

"'Tis enough for two," she said, significantly.

"'Tis, till the ice breaks up an' the fish strike—'tis more than enough," said Elihu.

She laughed coyly. She flashed a glance of invitation. Demurely, she dropped her eyes. This was all instinctive.

"They be enough for two," she laughed.

"'Melia Mary," said Elihu, and now, that the fear of loss had departed, voice and eyes were tender, "will you wed me?"

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"They be noa parson t' Ragged Harbour in winter," she said, flushing.

"Sammy Arnold do be the oldest man t' Ragged 'Arbour," he said, quickly. "He do be willin' t' wed us two."

"Do he ?"

"Iss, for a fair-sized fish, well salted. He do be great on havin' his fish salted."

A ceremony performed by the patriarch of the community was all that convention demanded.

"Woan't you ?" he pleaded. "Sure, I'll have the Bishop t' do it over, when he do come this summer."

Still she hesitated.

"Woan't you, 'Melia Mary ?"

'Melia Mary's answer would not long have been delayed had not young Jim Rideout passed under the hill, singing as he went; and this, the "Song of the Pirate Mate," was what he sang:

*Sure, the Skipper went ashoare,
Fol de rol, fol de rol,
When we made the Labrador,
Fol de rol !*

THE LOVE OF THE MAID

Then the mate he said, "Stand by!

Us'll leave un there t' die."

And the Skipper never sailed her any moare,

And the Skipper never sailed her any moare, heigh ho,

And the Skipper never sailed her any moare!

For the song was an echo of lighted eyes and dusk, when an arm, encircling her, had stirred a sweet disquietude within, and she had wondered and trembled and rejoiced; and this first rapture is like a dream of heaven, in that, though it vanish in the press of life, it never passes out of memory, but returns again with uplifting power. So the soul of 'Melia Mary was taken up into the cloudy places of sentiment, and there it hovered, striving, striving with its crippled wings, to mount to the glowing heights above, where true love is: striving, striving, striving, with its poor crippled wings. The hope of Elihu Gale was in deadly peril; for on that glad night the arm about the waist of the maid had not been the arm of Elihu Gale, to be sure, but of young Jim Rideout. Now, the song called back the dusk and the light in the eye, and the encircling arm. It was, indeed, as though Love, all-glorious, finding a hut in a wilderness, knocked on the door,

THE WAY OF THE SEA

and waited, and waited, and in compassion knocked again, being loath to leave, thus turned away.

III

It came about, later in that day, that 'Melia Mary made some errand to the Needle Rock, which Jim Rideout must pass on his way home from a search of the ice for young seals; and when Jim found her there he stopped to pass a merry word or two; but she saw that the hunt had once more been vain, and she would not smile, for she could not.

"Do they be a west wind comin', Jim?" she asked, anxiously.

"Sure, I doan't know," said Jim.

"Is you sure?"

"They be none t' my mind," he answered.

"Is you hungry?" she said, after a silence.

"Uh-huh. Is you?"

"Uh-huh. Barb'rous."

"Billy Luff t' your house last even'?" he asked, in a shamefaced way.

"Iss."

"Did un leave some—something—from me?"

She nodded.

THE LOVE OF THE MAID

“Caplin ?”

“Uh-huh. Two.”

“Did you eat un ?”

“Iss—all,” with a sigh.

“Was they good ?” he asked, grinning broadly.

She nodded emphatically.

“Wasn’t they, though !” Jim burst out. His face shone with a smile. He smacked his lips as though he, too, had had a part in the feast on those two little fish, which, being young, were not much larger than well-grown sardines. “I found they two caplin t’ Aunt Phœbe’s stage loft. They wasn’t noa moare.”

“They be fish t’ Ragged Harbour,” she said, abruptly.

“Who has un ?” he demanded.

“An’ flour, an’ potatoes, an’—an’—*tea*.”

“Who has un ?” he cried. “Sure, an’ I’ll get you——”

“Elihu Gale,” she said, quietly. “They be enough for two.”

Jim’s grasp of the situation was not slow to come. He perceived that Elihu had made offer to sell for the maid herself.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

“ Be you goain’ t’ wed un, ’Melia ? ” he asked.

She looked at the ground. The sound of his voice had changed all of a sudden, and that which had come into it was sad, and she could not look at him.

“ Be you, girl ? ”

She kicked at a stone in the path, and this was all that broke the silence.

“ Sure you is,” said Jim, forcing a hollow heartiness. “ ’Tis the oonly thing they be t’ do.”

Still the maid was silent.

“ ’Tis all they be t’ do,” said he, persuasively. “ Wed un, girl ! sure do, now—do.”

’Melia Mary turned away. He began to coax her to cast him off—that she might gain Elihu and his fish ; for he would make no complaint of the hurt he suffered.

“ Woan’t you, please, ’Melia ? ” he pleaded.

“ Iss,” said she.

“ Sure,” Jim sighed.

So, in the evening, ’Melia Mary, who was beloved of all the youth of Ragged Harbour, sought out old Elihu Gale, in his cabin near the Staff, and said that she would wed him. Now, the soul of

THE LOVE OF THE MAID

Elihu, for the once and for the moment, was lifted from its sodden estate—from a waste, slimy and dread—to those ethereal gardens where tenderness and grace and reverence bloom, and all the paths are sunlit and fragrant: where, indeed, though men care not, all souls may dwell continually, by leave of love, which holds the golden key. Here, remote from the things of the waste, the man took the maid in his arms; and in that strong, close embrace—in arms which were mighty for protection—she knew that she had found a safe place: wherein, on bleak coasts, the beauty of women has its achievement, and can seek no more, though other blessings may by grace be added unto it. When, in this restful surety, she smiled, Elihu Gale lifted up his face, moved by love to look to high places, and vowed that the little children of Ragged Harbour should no more suffer for lack of potatoes and flour, but that their hunger should be satisfied, for the sake of their laughter, which he desired to hear, and the red blood in their cheeks, in which his eyes could delight; whence it may appear that the seed which had fallen into a crevice of his craggy heart and there sprouted into living green was, after all,

THE WAY OF THE SEA

the seed of a plant with a flower—a tiny, puny, lonely blossom; but yet a blossom, which is a grace the hearts of men may lack.

IV

Love sows industriously and broadcast when Spring turns the soil of hearts with its glowing plough. Sunlight and a tempered wind! Yellow, balmy days! In hearts that are fertile, the seeds burst, and shoot, and flower, all in a moment, as of some heavenly magic; and the perfume is wafted to the fallow places, which remember, and rejoice again. All the wilderness is about the business of mating. How sweet the sound of it! It is twitter and flutter, twitter and flutter the day long on the Old Crow Road. Twitter and flutter, twitter and flutter! What pomposity! What sighs! What songs! What excitement! There are errands to be flashed through the limpid air—errands to be flashed in hot haste, so very important are they. Why, sir, the wisp of soft hemp on the broken bough of the hemlock which overhangs the cliff may be snatched by other beaks. And what may not overtake the thistle down by the Big Black

THE LOVE OF THE MAID

Rock ? Flit away after it ! Searching, gathering, weaving—these are the duties of nesting time. Each succeeding Spring had found the heart of young Jim Rideout responsive. No exception this ; when, in good season, Spring advanced, and the fishes swam the sea again, he sighed and fell in love with another maid, and wed her out of hand ; and flowers bloomed without and within the cottage he builded under Quid Nunc, where the tickle rocks disclose the florid sunsets ; and he lived happy ever afterward.

The heart of Jim Rideout was no heart for a tragedy.

THE HEALER FROM FAR-AWAY COVE

Chapter VII

THE HEALER FROM FAR-AWAY COVE

WHEN Jared Luff came to Poverty Cove from Green Bay, at the end of a search of that grey, jagged coast for better fishing, Ishmael Roth determined to go away, though he had been born there. "They's too many folk t' Poverty Cove now, Skipper John," he called to John East one clammy dawn, when they were hauling the salmon-nets off Frothy Head. "Sure, I've nothin' agin Jared Luff, but with him come here they's handy t' twenty-seven families t' the Cove. 'Tis too many for me, b'y. I feels crowded like. I'll be goain' away, I'm thinkin'—far away, down t' the Labrador, where 'tis quieter." Skipper John paused, with the dripping net in his hand. He looked over the sea to the blue-black waste of rock and stunted spruce whither the mist was drifting—to that break in the bluff where the cottages were huddled as though shrink-

THE WAY OF THE SEA

ing from the desolation round about. Then he said, with a wise and solemn wag of his head: “ ’Tis a bit crowded, b’y. Maybe, now, you has the right of it. An’ a man must follow his bent.” So, when the salmon run was over, Ishmael Roth put all that he had in a punt—his net and tackle and Bible and flour and pork and seed-potatoes, and the like—and set out to discover a new harbour where he might establish himself in quiet. “ I hates t’ leave it, Skipper John,” he said, as he pushed off from the stage. “ Sure, I does! I hates wonderful t’ leave un all. But ’tis gettin’ fair crowded, an’ I got t’ goa where ’tis quiet. Iss, b’y, I got t’ goa.”

He called the new harbour Far-Away Cove. There he lived all alone until he was old; and he was content, for all of sea and wilderness that the horizon encompassed was his for elbow-room.

“ The Lard led me to this place,” he told himself, by and by. “ ’Tis like, now, He’ll have some wark for me t’ do. I’ll listen—I’ll *listen for His voice!* ”

In the dawn and in the dusk, when the grey wind, as it coursed over the sea, stirred up waves

THE HEALER FROM FAR-AWAY COVE
to fret his punt, he listened to the hiss of the waters, lest the Voice should sound therein. In the mist, when the punt was hanging off-shore and the sea was beating the veiled rocks, he sought the Word in the deep thud and crash of the breakers. In the night, when the nor'east gale swept from the sea's bleak hidden places—when it pelted the windows with sleet and ran like mad into the wilderness—he listened for the Voice of the Lord, surely expecting it. When deep snow was on the hills, and the ice-packs covered the sea, he thought to hear the Word come out of the silence. In the evening, when the sun made great clouds flush and flare, turning at last their glory to a sullen glow, with the blackness of night following close—at the sunset, he looked far into the west that he might by favour see the face of the Lord, and the winging host of angels ascending and descending, as it is written. At all times he listened, believing always that the Lord would speak to him in the noises of that desolation, or appear to him in its vast and rugged beauties. By and by, it must be, when his long hair had turned white and a strange light was in his eyes, he heard the voice

THE WAY OF THE SEA

of the Lord, as he has said, commanding him to do some great thing. Traders and storm-bound Labrador fishermen, who had put into Far-Away Cove for shelter, brought the news down the Newfoundland coast that old Ishmael Roth held communication with the Lord God Almighty, who had appeared to him in visions. Then the people wondered what marvel Ishmael Roth would work—whether greater or less than the common marvels of a glory-fit.

“Sure,” thought Ishmael, at Far-Away Cove, “the Lard He’ve called me at last. He’ve give me a wark t’ do.”

So Ishmael prepared himself for the work; this he did by diligently poring over an old book, which had come down to him from his grandfather, who, as I believe, had taken it from a wreck of those old days. It was “The Englifh Physician Enlarged. With three hundred & fifty-nine Medicines. Being an Aftrologo Phyfical Difcourse of the Vulgar Herbs of this Nation; Containing a compleat Method of Phyfick, whereby a man may preferve his Body in Health, or Cure himfelf, being Sick, for Three Pence Charge. Herein is

THE HEALER FROM FAR-AWAY COVE
also fhewed the way of mixing Medicines according to the Caufe and mixture of the Difeafe and part of the Body afflicted. By Nich. Culpepper, Gent., Student in Phyfick and Aftrology. Sold by Nicholas Boone at the Sign of the Bible in Cornhill." In this book it is written that "A dead moufe, dried and beaten into powder, and given at a time, helps fuch as have pains in the fides." Moreover, it is set down that "Elks' claws or hoofs are a fovereign Remedy for the falling ficknefs, though it be but worn in a ring, much more being taken inwardly; but, faith Mizaldus, it *muft be the hoof of the right foot behind.*" Continuing, it is urged that "A man that hath the Dropfie, being set up in Sea Sand to the middle in it, draws out all the water," and that "The bone that is found in the Heart of a Stag is as fovreign a Cordial and as great a ftrenghthener of the Heart as any is, being beaten into Powder." All this I know to be true, for I have feen the book and know what it contains.

"Sure, the Lard He caft away the veflel," Ishmael argued, "an' the Lard fent my grandfather t' the wreck; the Lard took my grandfather when

THE WAY OF THE SEA

his time had come, nor neglected t' give the book into the hands of my father, who gave it to me. Sure, 'tis all the doin' o' the Lard, whose voice I've heered in the waves o' the sea an' in the wind that comes from beyond."

Ishmael pored over the book by day, and at night it fashioned strange dreams for him—vivid dreams, dreams of the cure of diseases.

"I am a healer by dreams," he thought. The consciousness of his high calling thrilled him. "I am a healer by dreams," he thought. "The Lard He've commanded me t' goa down the coast healin' all people."

Whereby you may know that the things of the wilderness and of the sullen sea, which are past understanding, had undone old Ishmael Roth.

Now while the healer from Far-Away Cove came down the coast, working strange cures, Ezra Westerly, of Ragged Harbour, waited patiently for a singular manifestation of the Lord's favour and great power to heal. He was a punt-fisherman, was Ezra—a young, big-boned man, gigantically framed, fearless in lop and gusty wind,

THE HEALER FROM FAR-AWAY COVE
and used to meeting the sea in all the strength
and bitterness of its raging. But he was a con-
sumptive; a spring gale, which swept over the hills
with an ugly design upon the Ragged Harbour
fleet, had cast him away on an ice-floe—a sleety
wind, with frost following—and he was now a lean,
gasping wreck.

“Sure, I wants t’ get well,” he said to Solomon
Stride. “I does that. I thinks—I *thinks* I will
get well. But I wants you t’ know, Solomon, b’y,
that I isn’t afeered t’ die. If the Lard takes me,
I’ll be fair willin’ t’ goa. I’ll do noa grievin’, b’y
—none at all, b’y; none at all. But——”

“Ay, but——” said Solomon. “Sure, ’twill turn
out all right. ’Twill be a——”

“If ’tis,” Ezra went on, closing his scrawny
fist—“if ’tis oonly a son, Solomon, I’ll get well.
I knows it.”

“Ay,” said Solomon, “they’s great virtue in
the touch o’ the seventh son of a seventh son. ’Tis
like ’twill cure you.”

“Just t’ touch the weenie finger o’ the babe,”
Ezra said, eagerly, “an’ ’twill cure you, they tells
me, them that knows—’twill cure you!”

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"They'll be news from Fortune Harbour soon, I'm thinkin'."

"Ay, sure. 'Twill be noa moare than a day or two now."

"The Lard'll send she a son, I'm thinkin'," said Solomon, hopefully.

"If oanly 'tis," was the wistful response—"if—oanly—'tis—a son!"

Solomon drew nearer. "Is you prayin'?" he whispered.

"Iss, b'y," Ezra answered, solemnly. "I'm prayin' desperate."

"So'm I," said Solomon.

"I take it kind o' you, Solomon," said Ezra. "Sure, the Lard listens t' such men as you."

"Sh-h, man!" said Solomon. "'Tis nothin'."

The wife of Thomas Bow, of Fortune Harbour, gave birth to the seventh son of a seventh son. Great is the favour of the Lord! said the folk of that place. But 'twas a pity, said they, that 'twas at the cost of the life of Amanda Bow, who was a neighbourly woman and a good mother. There was a gale abroad that night—a sweeping, swirling wind from the northeast, where the great gales

THE HEALER FROM FAR-AWAY COVE
are loosed upon the sea. Gust after gust swooped down, as from the black and tattered clouds they were driving. They beat the water to a tossing, frothy waste, and broke great waves against the rocks of the coast. Then a mist and bitter rain swept in from the open. Off-shore it was thick and raw and lippy—such a night as racks men's nerves and shakes their very bones. But the punts put out from Fortune Harbour to spread the news of the birth of the seventh son of a seventh son. Those men who had been waiting to carry the tidings to the sick of their harbours ran into the mist and wind without show of fear. The seventh son of a seventh son had been born!

“’Tis a son!” thought Ezra Westerly, when he was awakened by a great knocking on the door at dawn. “Sure, ’tis Jimmie Lute come t’ tell me the news.”

Again the knocking.

“Ezra! Ezra!”

The consumptive went to the window and put out his head. “Is it a son t’ Fortune Harbour, Jimmie?” he gasped. The exertion of raising the window had been too much for him.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

“Sure, ’tis,” cried Jimmie. “I heered un cry afore I come away. Quick, man! Leave us get started. They fears the child’s a bit——”

A gust of wind put an end to the sentence. Ezra shrank from the cold, wet blast.

“’Twill be a beat over,” said he.

“Ay, a dead beat into the wind. They’s a nasty switch on the sea. But us’ll get over, man. Make haste, now.”

With the help of his wife, Ezra dressed in haste.

“’Tis a son, Mary!” he said, again and again, hysterically repeating it. “’Tis a son, woman. Think o’ that! ’Tis the seventh son of a seventh son.” Haste and hope wrought him into a high fever of excitement. He could do nothing to help himself. Petulant exclamations broke from him. “Hut, woman!” he cried, “has you nothin’ but thumbs? That’s noa way t’ button a man’s gal-luses!” When he was helped down to the wharf his clothes were all awry and his wraps were falling from him. Jimmie Lute lifted him into the punt and covered him with a tarpaulin. “Push off, b’y! Push off!” said Ezra. The punt ran

THE HEALER FROM FAR-AWAY COVE
through the narrows to the sea, where a grey light
was spreading over the waves. "Drive her, b'y!
Drive her!" said Ezra. Driven she was—that
stout little punt. "What you can't carry you
can drag," said young Jimmie Lute, between his
teeth. But there was a knowing hand on her sheet
and tiller, for all that; and in four hours she reeled
into Fortune Harbour, with a crested wave at her
heels, loggy with shipped water, and dripping wet
from stem to stern.

"That'll be the house, I'm thinkin'—that wee
white one on the hill, under the bluff," said
Ezra.

"Iss," said Jimmie. "The one with the crowd
at the door. 'Tis where the child lies."

"Leave us hurry," said Ezra, eagerly.

They met Thomas Bow on the path up the hill.
Ezra was resting—to catch his breath and quiet
his heart. Thomas was downcast and bewildered.

"Is you come t' be healed, Ezra?" he said.

"Iss, b'y. Sure, I've come t' touch the child.
But I'll touch un easy, Thomas—just as easy as
I'm able."

"Will you, now?" said Thomas, running his

THE WAY OF THE SEA

hand through his frowsy hair, staring the while at Ezra in a vacant way.

“Just a touch, b’y. Sure I wouldn’t think o’ hurtin’ the wee thing.”

“I doan’t know as ’twill do you any good,” said Thomas, with a puzzled frown.

Ezra darted an anxious glance into his eyes. “Is they noa cures worked yet?” he whispered.

Thomas scratched his head.

“Nar a one?” said Ezra.

“The child’s dead,” said Thomas.

Ezra gasped. “’Tis a pity!” he cried, his voice strong and athrill with sympathy. “’Tis a pity, man, t’ lose your wee child like that. I’m fair sorry for you.”

“Iss,” said Thomas, with a sigh. “’Twould ’a’ been grand t’ have the seventh son of a seventh son t’ fish from the same punt with me. ’Tis a pity.”

“Ay, ’tis a wonderful pity!”

“I’m thinkin’,” said Thomas, “that they was too many folk in the room. The women handled the child a wonderful lot. ’Tis like, now,” he burst out angrily, “that they—they—they was

THE HEALER FROM FAR-AWAY COVE
too much huggin' an' handlin' o' that there
child."

They watched the mist break and lift—the sunlight spread over the sea.

"Leave us goa hoame, b'y," said Jimmie.

"Iss," Ezra whispered, for his voice had grown of a sudden very weak. "I'm thinkin'," he went on, with a fine smile, "that the Lard wants me in heaven. Leave us goa hoame."

They went down the path very slowly.

Meantime the healer from Far-Away Cove had come down the coast, passing from harbour to harbour in a rotten, ragged old punt, everywhere applying those cures which, as he believed, the Lord disclosed to him in dreams.

"I am a healer by command o' the Lard," he told the people. "He is my helper."

His eyes were blue and exceedingly mild, wide, and benignant, betraying no guile, but yet with a strange, fine light in them, such as might have burned in the eyes of prophets; and they had the power of looking deep into a man's heart. The people believed in him as he believed in himself.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

“Is you, now?” said they. “By command o’ the Lard! My, but ’tis a wonderful thing!”

It was at Wreck Arm that Ishmael came upon James Elder, who had suffered long of a pain in the foot.

“’Twill be a carn that’s troublin’ *you*, I’m thinkin’,” said the healer.

“Ay, man,” said James, looking wonderingly into Ishmael’s eyes. “Tell me, now, how did you come by the knowledge o’ that?”

“’Tis like, now,” said Ishmael, not heeding the question, “that if you got rid o’ the carn you’d be rid o’ the pain.”

“’Tis reasonable t’ think so,” James admitted.

“’Tis like,” said the healer, lifting his voice, “that if you put some gunpowder on the afflicted part an’ touched a match to un ’twould rid you o’ the carn.”

“Ay,” said James, “’tis reasonable t’ think ’twould blow un off.”

“Do it, lad!” said the healer.

Thus it came to pass that James Elder was relieved of his corn and his left foot—the latter in the hospital at St. John’s, some months later, where

THE HEALER FROM FAR-AWAY COVE
he was taken in a schooner. But the healer, when he came to treat Jabez Tulk, of Narrow Tickle, did not know that the foot was in danger. So he was not yet discouraged.

“I’m troubled a wonderful sight with the rheumatiz in me knee,” said Jabez.

“That’s bad, b’y,” said Ishmael. “I’ll have t’ dream over that—ay, I’ll have t’ dream over that.”

That night he consulted the book that Nich. Culpepper, Gent., Student in Phyfick and Aftrology, long ago wrote. In his sleep the Lord, as he thought, gave him a cure for rheumatism of the knee—the left knee. The next day he sought out Jabez in great anxiety.

“Is un the *left* knee, b’y?” he asked.

“Ay,” said Jabez, “’tis the left.”

“’Tis a sign! ’Tis a sign!” Ishmael cried, lifting a radiant face to the sky. “Sure I thought ’twas in the right knee, and ’twas for the right knee I asked the cure, but the Lard He give me a cure for the left. ’Tis a sign; ’tis a sign!”

“Have you the cure, b’y?” said Jabez.

Ishmael looked for a long time into his patient’s

THE WAY OF THE SEA

eyes. He seemed to be dreaming of some remote and lovely thing. There was a smile upon his face—a mild, radiant smile. He was now sure of his inspiration. Had not the Lord vouchsafed a sign?

“Iss,” said he, “I’ve the cure. Jabez, b’y, you must bury the knee in the earth for three days. ’Twill soak up the rheumatiz.”

“’Tis terrible rocky hereabouts,” said Jabez, doubtfully. “I fear they’s nar a place where it could be done handy.”

“Hut!” said Ishmael, in anger. “Will you despise the healin’ the Lard provides? Borrow the earth, b’y! Borrow un from Skipper Jonathan’s garden. Sure you can give un back when it soaks up the rheumatiz.”

“’Twould be sp’iled for growin’ potatoes,” said Jabez, still frowning.

“Man,” the healer exclaimed, “will you or won’t you?”

“I will,” said Jabez, “if the Lard tells me to.”

When Ishmael put out from Narrow Tickle, bound down to Ragged Harbour, he left Jabez Tulk lying on the ground, the afflicted knee buried in earth. By grace of an iron constitution Jabez

THE HEALER FROM FAR-AWAY COVE survived the pneumonia that followed. Thereupon the rheumatism left his knee, and to this day he maintains that he was healed by the man from Far-Away Cove, who charged him nothing, nor asked money from any other man.

In the evening of the day when the seventh son of a seventh son had died, Jimmie Lute made Ragged Harbour from Fortune, with Ezra West-erly lying exhausted and silent in the bow of the punt. The west was flaring red—the wind had fallen away—all the earth was quiet—the punt slipped over long, soft billows. Ishmael Roth rounded the Pillar just as Jimmie passed the Staff; the punts crept side by side down the narrows to the still water of the harbour, where it lay at the feet of the grim hills, all crimsoned by the sun.

“Is there a place where a man can be took in for a bit?” Ishmael called.

“Ay,” said Ezra, lifting himself on his arm. “They’s always a place t’ Ragged Ha’bour where an honest man can bide.”

Ishmael brought his punt alongside and caught hold of the other’s gunwale. He saw the pallor

THE WAY OF THE SEA

and hollowness of Ezra's face and heard the rattle in his throat.

"You is sick, man," he said. "You is desperate sick."

"I'm took with the decline, zur," said Ezra.

The need of healing, the sight of pain, made Ishmael's great heart ache. He wondered if the Lord would grant him a cure for this man.

"You has a wife, I'm thinkin'?" he said.

"And a wee babe," Ezra answered, smiling.

"An' the Lard will oanly let me," said Ishmael, looking far off, "I'll cure you."

So Ishmael was given a place in the home of Ezra Westerly. Night after night he waited for the Lord to make known the cure in a dream. By day he fished for Ezra from Ezra's punt—going regularly at dawn to the grounds off Mad Mull, and returning with his catch in the evening; taking Ezra's turn in the bait-skiff when the caplin schools came in; splitting cod far into the night, if the fish were running thick; spreading the catch to dry on the flake when the Mad Mull shallows were deserted. At odd times he pored over the old book, lest the Lord should think him lukewarm in

THE HEALER FROM FAR-AWAY COVE

his search for the cure. One night he read that section relating to "medicines made out of living things"—read and puzzled till his head was aching and muddled. "I am of opinion," said the book, "that the Suet of a Goat mixed with a little Saffron is as excellent an oyntment, especially for pains, as any is." Then, "The Froath of the Sea, it is hot and dry; Being mixed with powdered crabs' fhells, it helps chills. It helps baldnefs, and trimly decks the head with hair." Again, "The Bone that is found in the Heart of a Stag is as fovereign a Cordial and as great a ftrenghthener of the Heart as any is, being beaten into Powder." Thus on and on—poring over the list of strange cures.

"The heart of a stag," he thought, putting his hand to his brow. "Now they's a deal in that, I'm thinkin'."

He fell asleep over the table, at last, with his head on the old book.

Ishmael brought the punt in from the grounds early next day. The sun was out—shining bright and warm; the morning mist had been driven away.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

The harbour was still and hot and yellow. Ezra was sitting in the sunshine by the cottage door, sea and harbour spread before him, from the mossy rocks below to the far-off line of blue. He was looking dreamily over those places which had long been known to him.

"'Tis a fine time t' sit in the sun," he said, when Ishmael came up.

"Ay, b'y," said Ishmael, his eyes shining; "but you'll soon be *sailin'* in it. 'Twill be moare t' your taste, I'm thinkin'."

"Ishmael," said Ezra, "has you—*has you had the dream?*"

Hope grew strong in his face. Then his lips quivered, and he turned his eyes away, fearing new disappointment.

"Ay," said Ishmael, "the dream has come."

"Is it a sure cure, man? Tell me——"

"'Tis the heart of a bull—the heart of a black bull with a white face," said Ishmael. "Sure I knows noa bull like that, but they must be one somewheres, else the Lard wouldn't 'a' told me so."

"They is," Ezra whispered in awe. "'Tis

THE HEALER FROM FAR-AWAY COVE

Jacob Swift's bull t' Round Island. I knows un well. 'Tis a black bull with a white face."

"I knowed they was," said Ishmael, quietly. "Well, b'y," he went on, "you takes the heart from a live black bull with a white face. Then you b'iles un for two days in a black pot. Which done, you smokes un an' dries un like a salmon. Then you grinds un to powder—an' takes un reg'lar in goat's milk. 'Tis a cure for the decline—'tis a sure cure!"

"Man," said Ezra, "it must be Jacob Swift's bull. He've a wonderful white face, that one!"

"'Tis queer," Ishmael mused, "what things the Lard keeps track of. 'Tis queer, now, that He knowed they was a white-faced bull hereabout—'tis wonderful queer!"

"I wonder what Jacob Swift'll be askin' for the heart of his bull?"

"'Twill be so much, I'm thinkin'," said Ishmael, "as the whole bull's worth."

"Ay, he's a mean man."

"I've some silver," said Ishmael, "which would be a part o' the price."

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"I've a punt an' two salmon-nets," said Ezra.
"'Tis like I can sell un for something."

"Ezra," said the wife Mary, coming through the door, "I've heered you talkin'. Man," she said, laying her clasped hands on her bosom, "but I'm—I'm—*happy*! I've the garden, b'y, an'——"

"Noa, noa, woman," said Ezra. "I'll not have you lose a thing your fawther give you. I'll not do it."

"But, b'y," said she, "when you gets well 'twill be easy t' get un back."

"Ay," said Ezra, softly, "'tis true. When I gets well, Mary, I'll buy un back. I'll buy you two gardens, dear, when I gets t' the fishin' agin."

"Ah, Ezra," she said, "but 'twill be *fine* t' have you strong agin. My, but 'twill!"

"You is a lovin' wife, Mary," he answered; and he added, solemnly, "an' I'll be a lovin' man t' you."

"Blessed be the name o' the Lard," said Ishmael, "because He has made known the cure!"

Jimmie Lute was despatched to Round Island

THE HEALER FROM FAR-AWAY COVE

with the healer from Far-Away Cove to buy the heart of the black bull with the white face. When Jacob Swift, who owned the bull, perceived the urgency of their business, he demanded all that they had; for, said he, "If the Lard God A'mighty keeps an eye on my bull, 'tis a gran' fine bull; an' if the Lard sets such a store by the heart o' the beast, 'twould be noa moare'n respectful for me t' put a good price on it." But what cared Ezra? What cared Mary? What cared the healer? What cared Jimmie Lute? What cared they all when they had the queer, black powder safe in the jar? It was a happy, wonderful hour, indeed, when the cure was begun.

"T' think o' you bein' strong agin!" said Mary. "Just t' *think* o' that! Sure I can hardly bear it, Ezra—I can hardly bear the joy of it."

"Ay, 'tis a wonderful thing, this cure," said Ezra. "Does you think, Ishmael," turning to the healer, "that 'twill cure me in two weeks?"

"I'm not so sure o' that, b'y," said Ishmael. "Sometimes the Lard works slow, an' sometimes 'tis wonderful fast. 'Twill not be moare'n three weeks, I'm thinkin'."

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"The herrin'-bait'll be comin' in," said Ezra, taking the medicine-jar in his hand to fondle it. "In three weeks I'll be settin' me nets agin. 'Tis hard t' think it. Ay," he whispered, "'tis hard t' believe."

Mary was quick to mark his exhaustion—his dull stare, the flush, the rasping breath.

"'Tis time for you t' be goain' t' bed, b'y," she said, softly.

"Ay," he answered, "'tis time for you t' help me up. But at this time o' night, come three weeks," he went on, looking up to her with a smile, "I'll be splittin' fish—me own catch, Mary, me own catch."

"'Tis gran' t' think it," said she.

There came a night in the fall, with a gale driving the rain against the windows of the little room where Ezra lay, when the man knew that his hope had been mistaken. Great gusts of wind, breaking from the sea, where they had swirled and leaped all unopposed, shook the house as they swished past to lash the inland wilderness. In the intervals, when these rushing noises fell away, the

THE HEALER FROM FAR-AWAY COVE
night was filled with the deep, mighty roar of the breakers. Ezra could hardly lift his voice above it all.

"'Tis a barb'rous bad night," said he.

The old healer from Far-Away Cove sighed. His head was fallen over his breast. He had no heart to look up.

"Ah, Ishmael," said Ezra, a rush of pity for the broken man making his voice quiver and his grey lips tremble, "you'll not be grievin' no moare because the cure failed. 'Twas all a mistake, man — 'twas but a mistake."

"Ay," said Mary, "he've done what he could."

Ishmael looked up. His face was sallow and haggard. He drew his hand over his eyes in a dull, helpless way. "I've been thinkin'," he whispered, "that I'm nothin' but a misled man."

"Noa, noa," said Ezra. "The Lard leads *you*, Ishmael."

"I'm thinkin'," the healer went on, his face contorted by agony, "that I've mistook my call-in'. 'Tis like the Lard never meant *me* t' be a healer."

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"Sure He did!" said Mary. "They's nar a doubt about that."

They were silent—all cast down in bitterness and despair, while the rain rattled on the window-panes and a burst of wind beat furiously upon the house.

"Ishmael," said Ezra at last, "you done your best."

"Ay," said the healer, "I done my best."

"An' I done my best," said Ezra.

"Ay, an' you done your best."

"The Lard He done His best—surely the Lard done His best," said Ezra, gently.

"Ay; surely the Lard He done His best," said Ishmael. "Blessed be the Lard."

"There's noa call t' grieve, Ishmael," said Mary. "They's noa call at all."

"I'm thinkin'," said Ezra, "that they was a mistake. The Lard would make noa mistake, Ishmael; but the instruments, man—was they noa mistake made by them?"

Ishmael looked up.

"Ishmael," said Ezra, "'twas the heart of a *live* bull the Lard told us t' take."

THE HEALER FROM FAR-AWAY COVE

“ Ay, a live bull.”

“ Ishmael, *is you sure the bull wasn't dead when you cut the heart out?* ”

Then the old strange light, the light that might have burned in prophets' eyes, shone again in Ishmael's.

“ O Lard,” he cried, lifting up his face, for his faith had been restored, “ great is Thy power and marvellous are Thy works! ”

Ezra sighed happily, though he was dying.

So the healer from Far-Away Cove went back to the north. “ The Lard has not failed me,” he said to the people. “ I've failed Him. I'll be preparin' myself further—preparin' myself further—makin' ready for the wark, agin' the real time when I'm called t' do it.” He went back to that far-off desolation, where, in the dawn and in the dusk, he might listen again for the Voice in the hiss of breaking waters. He sought that place where, in the thud and crash of breakers, the Word might be spoken. He passed from the inhabited coast to the loneliness of bleak rocks and a wilderness that the Lord might speak to him in the

THE WAY OF THE SEA

silence or in the driving gale. Again, in the evening, when the flush and flare were upon great clouds, he looked for the face of the Lord, and for the winging host of angels ascending and descending, as it is written. There, from day to day, he waited for the Voice and the Call.

And there he died.

IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

Chapter VIII

IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

LET it be made plain, in the beginning, that the dear Lord had nothing to do with it, for the doors of that poor heart were fast closed against Him, and the benighted child within trembled, ever trembled, to hear Love's timid knocking: such, gentle reader, is the teaching of grey seas and a bleak coast—the voice of thunder is a voice of warning, but the waving of the new-blown blossom, where the sunlight falls upon it, is a lure to damnation. It was not the dear Lord: it was the Lord God A'mighty—a fantastic misconception, the work of the blind minds of men, which has small part with mercy and the high leading of love. Men's imaginations, being untutored and unconfined, fashion queer gods of the stuff the Infinite contains. When they roam afar—as from bleak places, where no yellow fields, no broad, waving acres, yielding bounteously, make love manifest to the children of men, nor

THE WAY OF THE SEA

do vaulted forests, all reverberant to the wind's solemn strains, inspire souls to deeper longing—when they roam afar, it may be, the gods they fetch back are terrible gods. In Ragged Harbour, some men have fashioned a god of rock and tempest and the sea's rage—a gigantic, frowning shape, throned in a mist, whereunder black waters curl and hiss, and are cold and without end; and in the right hand of the shape is a flaming rod of chastisement, and on either side of the throne sit grim angels, with inkpots and pens, who jot down the sins of men, relentlessly spying out their innermost hearts; and behind the mist, far back in the night, the flames of pain, which are forked and writhing and lurid, light up the clouds and form an aureole for the shape and provide him with his halo. No, it was not the dear Lord who had to do with the case of Nazareth Lute of Ragged Harbour—not the Lord who lives in melting hearts and therefrom compassionately proceeds to the aid and comfort of all the sons of men, even as it is written: it was the Lord God A'mighty.

Now, the father of this Lute, old Richard Lute,

IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

of the path to Squid Cove, where it rounds the Man-o'-War, called his first-born Nazareth and changed his own name to Jesus when he was converted, believing it to be no sin, but, indeed, a public confession of old transgressions and new faith—a deed of high merit, which might counter-balance even so much as the past unrighteousness of putting more sea-water than lobsters in the cans he had traded with Luke Dart, and would be so counted unto him when he stood on the waters at the foot of the throne and the dread account was put in his hand. “If it goas agin’ them lobsters on the Lord God A’mighty’s bill,” he told the people, “’twill do. If it oan’y goas agin’ the lobsters, b’y,” he said to young Solomon Stride, “maybe—maybe, b’y—I’ll have a balance t’ me favour, an’ I’ll slip through the pearly gate. ’Twere a clever thought, b’y, changin’ me name—iss, ’twere; iss, ’twere!” Thereafter, Jesus Lute lived righteously, according to the commands of his god; but he died mad: because, as it has been said and I do verily believe, he dwelt overmuch on those things which are eternal—wondering, wondering, wondering, in sunlight and mist and night,

THE WAY OF THE SEA

off shore in the punt, labouring at the splitting table, spreading fish on the flake, everywhere, wondering all the while where souls took their flight. So much of Richard Lute: and it must be said, too, that the mother of this Nazareth was of a piety exceeding deep. She was famed in seven harbours for her glory fits—for her visions and prophecies and strange healings—and from seven harbours folk came for to see, when it was noised abroad that a glory fit was upon her or at hand: to see and to hear, and to interrogate the Lord God A'mighty concerning the time and manner of death, for it was believed that the Lord God A'mighty spoke with her lips at such times.

“But it gets the weather o’ me how that b’y comes by his wickedness,” said old Solomon Stride, when Nazareth had grown to be a man. “It do get the weather o’ me. He’ve a gun’le load of it—sure he have.”

“They was nar a sinful hair to his mother’s head,” said Ruth, Solomon’s wife.

“Sure, noa, dear,” said Solomon. “Nor yet ar a one to his fawther’s—when he had ar a one, afore he capsized, poor mortal; which he hadn’t

IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

t' the mad-house t' Saint John's, they says, 'cause he just would tear un out, an' they was noa such thing as his heavin' to."

"'Tis queer," said Ruth. "But they be lots o' things that's queer—about religion," she added, with a sigh, and plucking at her apron. "An' his mother were oan'y here t' have a glory fit, us might find out—find out——"

"What might us find out, dear?"

"Sh-h-h! They be things about Heaven 'tis not for we t' know."

"'Tis true; but the dear Lord is wise—wise an' kind, noa matter what some poor folk tries t' make Un out."

"The Lord God's the Lord God A'mighty," said Ruth, quickly, speaking in fear.

"I 'low He'm better'n us thinks," said Solomon, looking into the depths of the sunset.

"Solomon, b'y," said Ruth, "I fear me you'll be a-sittin' in the seat o' the scorner afore long."

"Noa, dear," said Solomon. "Noa, noa!"

To be sure, the wickedness of Nazareth Lute was of a most lusty, lively character: not a dullard, shiftless wickedness, which contents itself with an

THE WAY OF THE SEA

unkempt beard, a sleep in the sunshine, and a maggoty punt. It was a wickedness patent to all the folk of Ragged Harbour: so, only the unrighteous, who are wise in a way, and the children, who are all-wise, loved him; and it may be that the little people loved him for one of his sins—the sin of unfailing jollity, in which he was steeped. His beard, which was curly and fair and rooted in rosy flesh, and his voice, which was deep and throbbing, and his blue eyes, which flashed fire in the dusk, were, each in its way, all wicked: the hearts of the maids fluttered and told them so when he came near. The poise of his head, and his quick, bold glance, proclaimed him devil-may-care; and his saucy wit and irreverence put the matter beyond all doubt. His very gait—his jaunty, piratical roll down the Old Crow Road—was a flouting of the Lord God A'mighty, before whom, as Uncle Simon Luff has it, men should bear themselves as “wrigglin’ worms.” He wickedly gloried in his strength—in the breadth and height and might of himself; ever forgetting, as Uncle Simon said, that the “grass withereth, an’ the tall trees is laid low.” In boyhood his ambi-

IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

tions were all wicked: for he longed to live where he could go to the theatre, of the glittering delights of which he had read in a tract, and to win money at cards, of which he had read in another. Later, his long absences and riotous returns were wicked: his hip-pocket bulged with wickedness for a week after he came ashore from the mail-boat, and for the same week his legs wickedly wobbled and the air was tainted with wickedness where he breathed. The deeds he did on his cruises were wicked, in truth—ever more deeply wicked: wicked past conception to the minds of men who do not know the water-fronts of cities, nor have imagined the glaring temptations which there lie in wait.

“They’s a spring o’ sin in the innards o’ that there b’y,” said Uncle Simon Luff, “an’ ’twill never run dry ’til the fires o’ hell sap un up.”

When Nazareth Lute was thirty-two years old, he came ashore from the mail-boat, one night in spring, after long absence from Ragged Harbour; and he was sober, and very solemn. He went straight to his father’s house, on the Squid Cove path, where he now lived alone; and there he re-

THE WAY OF THE SEA

mained until the evening of the next day, which was the Sabbath. When Sammy Arnold tolled the bell, he set out for the meeting-house in his punt; observing which, many people went to church that night. At the after-meeting, for which, curiously, everybody waited, Nazareth stood up, the first of all; whereupon there was a rustle, then a strained hush, which filled the little place, even to the shadows where the rafters were.

“O friends,” he began, in a dry, faltering voice, “I come here, the night—I come here, where I were barn an’ raised—t’ this here ha’bour where I warked on me fawther’s flake as a wee child, an’ kept the head of his punt up t’ the wind many a day on the Grapplin’ Hook grounds as a lad, an’ jigged squid for his bait many a sunset-time after the caplin school was gone off shore—here where I were a paddle punt fisherman on me own hook as a man—I come here, O friends, the night,” his voice now rising tremulously, “t’ tell all you folk how my poor soul were saved from the damnation o’ the Lard God A’mighty.” He stopped to wet his lips, and to gulp, for lips and throat were dried out; then he went on, the light of conviction

IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

burning ever brighter in his eyes: "O friends, I been standin' on the brink o' hell these many year, all afire o' the stinkin' flames o' sin, as you knows; an' the warnin's o' the Lard God A'mighty, hisself, which he sent me in three wrecks an' the measles, was like the shadow o' some small cloud—like a shadow a-runnin' over the sea; for the shadow passes quickly, an' the sea is the same as he were afore. (Amen, an' Amen, O Lard!) Likewise, O friends, was the warnin's o' God A'mighty t' my poor soul," he went on, his voice of a sudden charged with the tearful quality of humiliation, "'til Toosday, a week gone, at six o'clock, or thereabouts, in the marnin'. The day afore that, O friends, I were bound out from Saint John's t' Twillingate, in ballast o' salt, along o' Skipper Peter Alexander Bull an' a crew o' four hands, which is some'at short-handed for Skipper Peter Alexander's schooner, as you all knows. (O Lard!) When we was two hours out, the skipper he got drunk; an' the cook, which was Jonathan Bluff from this here ha'bour, he were drunk a'ready, as I knows, for I lent a hand t' stow un away when he come aboard; an' when the

THE WAY OF THE SEA

skipper he got drunk, an' the cook he were drunk a'ready, James Thomson and William Cole they got drunk, too, for they was half drunk an' knowed noa better." They were now all listening enrapt; and from time to time they broke into exclamations, as they were moved by Nazareth's dramatic recital. "So I were the oan'y able hand aboard o' she," the man went on, speaking hoarsely, as though again in terror of the thing he did, "an' I says t' myself, though I had the wheel, O friends (Lard! Lard!), I said t' myself, which was sunk in iniquity an' knowed not the heaviness o' sin (Save un, O Lard, save un!), says I, 'I might's well be drunk, too.' So I goas down t' the fo'cas'le, O friends, an' in the fo'cas'le I gets me dunnybag (O Lard!), an' from the dunnybag I takes a bottle (O Lard, O Lard!), an' out o' the bottle I draws the stopper (O Lard A'mighty!), an' I raises the bottle t' me lips (Stop un, O Lard!), an'—an'—I gets drunk, then an' there; so then the schooner she were in the hands o' the wind, which it were blowin' so light as a'most nothin' from the sou'east, an' we was well off shcre."

IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

Nazareth paused. He raised his right arm, and looked up, as though in supplication. His head dropped over his breast, and he was still silent; so the old parson raised this hymn:

*“ When, rising from the bed of death,
O’erwhelm’d with guilt and fear,
I see my Maker face to face,
Oh, how shall I appear ?*

*“ If yet, while pardon may be found
And mercy may be sought,
My heart with inward horror shrinks
And trembles at the thought,*

*“ When thou, O Lord, shall stand disclosed,
In majesty severe,
And sit in judgment on my soul,
Oh, shall I appear ? ”*

And this hymn all the people sang, from the shrill-voiced young to the quavering, palsied old — sang with joyful enthusiasm, as they who have escaped great terror.

“ In the night,” Nazareth went on, “ I hears a noise; so I said, ‘ What’s that ? ’ The skipper he woke up, an’ says, ‘ ’Tis a rat.’ ’Twasn’t, though; but I falls asleep, once moare, an’ when

THE WAY OF THE SEA

I wakes up in the marnin' I be all a-shakin' and blinded by the liquor, an' I sees queer streaks o' green an' yellow in the air. So I goas on deck, an' there I sees that the schooner do be rubbin' her nose fair agin' Yellow Rock, by the tickle t' Seldom Cove; an' she've wrecked her bowsprit, an' she've like t' stove a hoale in her port side. But the sea is all ripplin', an' they is hardly noa wind; so she pounds easy." Nazareth looked up to the grimy rafters overhead, and the words following he addressed to the Lord his God, his voice thrilling as his soul's exaltation increased: "An' I looked up, an' I sees you, O Lard God A'mighty, sittin' on the top o' Yellow Rock; an' your cloathes do be spun o' fog, an' your face is hid from me. Iss, O Lard, you was a-lookin' down on me; an' you sings out, O Lard, 'Nazareth Lute,' you sings out, 'repent!' But behind the cloud which hid your face, like a veil, O Lard God A'mighty, I knowed you was a-frownin'; an' I was scared, an' said nar a word. 'Nazareth Lute,' you sings out, agin, 'repent afore you're lost!' But I were still scared, O Lard God A'mighty, for the light o' the cloud went out, an' it were black, like the

IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

first cloud of a great starm. ‘Nazareth Lute,’ you says for the third time, ‘repent afore you’re hove into the fires o’ hell!’ Then the cloud shivered, like when the wind tears un t’ bits; an’ my voice come t’ me, an’ I says, ‘Iss, Lard, I will.’” Turning once more to the people, Nazareth said: “Then I sings out, ‘All hands on deck!’ But the crew was drunk, an’ did not come; an’ when I looked up again t’ Yellow Rock, the Lard was gone from that place. So I soused the hands with buckets o’ water, O friends; an’ over the head o’ the skipper I slushed three of un, for he were the drunkest of all. So when they was sober agin we set sail, an’ the Lard sent us a fair time, an’ we come safe t’ Twillingate. The fight do be over for me, O friends—the long, long fight I fought with sin. ’Tis over now—all over; an’ I’ve come t’ peace. For I found the Lard God A’mighty, a-sittin’ there on Yellow Rock, by the tickle t’ Seldom Cove, a-frownin’ in a cloud.”

That was the manner of the conversion of Nazareth Lute; and, thereafter, he lived righteously, even as his father had lived, according to the commands of the Lord God A’mighty, his god, whom

THE WAY OF THE SEA

he had fashioned of tempest and rock and the sea's rage, with which his land had abundantly provided him. Thereafter he lived righteously; but his eyes were blinded to all those beauties, both great and small, which the dear Lord has strewn in hearts and places, in love withholding not; and his ears were stopped against the tender whisperings which twilight winds waft with them, from the infinite to the infinite: for it was as though the cloud and flame of the wrath of his god, following after, cast a shadow before him and filled the whole earth with the thunder and roar and crackling of their pursuit. Thereupon, indeed, he became a fisherman again, and thereafter he lived righteously: for he did not thereafter do many things which he had been used to doing. All the maids with dimpled cheeks, and all the children, know that he put the sin of jollity far from him. Also, it is told to this day, when men speak of righteous lives, how that he hung his last clay pipe from a rafter, and looked upon it morning and evening, after prayer, to remind himself that sensual delights, such as are contained in the black, cracked bowls of pipes, are like snares set for the

IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

souls of the unwary. Moreover, it can be proved how that once, when he could not take the punt to his nets on a Saturday night, the wind being high, he freed all the fish on Monday morning, freed them all, the quintal upon quintal of gleaming fish in the trap—more, then and there in the nets by chance, than the Lord God A'mighty had granted to his labour all that summer through; but, thereby, he saved himself from the charge of desecrating the Sabbath in permitting his nets to work on that day, which the grim angels were waiting to note down against him, and he gained greatly in humility and in strength against temptation. He lived righteously: for, as he fled the wrath of his god, the cloud and flame were close behind; and at the end of the toilsome path, as upon the crest of a long hill, was set the City of Light and the gates of the City, wherethrough men passed to a shining splendour.

“I been thinkin', b'y,” he said to Solomon Stride, at the time of one blood-red sunset when their punts were side by side coming in from the Mad Mull grounds, “that I doan't know as I'll want one o' they golden harps.”

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"Sure, an' why not, b'y?" Solomon called over from the purpling water.

"I doan't know as I will," said Nazareth, "for I was never much of a hand at the jew's-harp. 'Twill be gran' for you, b'y. You was always a wonderful hand at that, an' the harp o' gold'll come easy t' l'arn. Sure, you'll pick un up in a day. But with me 'tis different. I—I—can't so much's whistle a hymn, Solomon. Noa, b'y, I doan't know as I'll want one o' they harps; but if they's a sea there, b'y, they's fish in it, an' if the sea's gold the fish's gold; an' 'tis like, b'y, they'll be hooks as well as harps, an' maybe a trap an' a seine or two. An' if they's——"

"You is all wrong about Heaven," said Solomon. "They's noa eatin' there, Nazareth."

"'Tis true, b'y, maybe—iss, maybe 'tis," said Nazareth, in all humility admitting the possibility of error. "'Twould be hard eatin' the fish o' gold, whatever. But, maybe," with a reflective frown, "they's a queer kind o' teeth comes with the new body. Oh, well, whatever," with a sigh, "I doan't know what I'll do when I gets there—sure an' I doan't."

IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

“You’ll take a grip on a harp, b’y,” Solomon cried, enthusiastically, “an’ you’ll swing your flipper over the golden strings, an’——”

“Noa, noa! ’Twould be a sinful waste o’ good harps for the Lord God A’mighty t’ put one in my hands. I’d break un sure.”

“But He’ve a great heap o’ them, an’ He’d——”

“Noa, noa!”

“But He’d l’arn you, b’y; He’d l’arn you t’——”

“Noa, b’y—noa. ’Twould be too tough a job, an’ I wouldn’t put the Lard God A’mighty t’ the trouble o’ that. Noa, noa; if they’s noa fish in that there sea I doan’t know what I’ll do when I gets there. I doan’t know what I’ll do, Solomon. I doan’t know what I’ll do——all the time.”

Nazareth Lute thought that a man should search diligently for things to do in the last light of day, nor be cast down when no work lay at hand about the cottage or the punt or the flake, but look to the condition of the caplin in the loft, or gather soil for a new potato patch: in his sight,

THE WAY OF THE SEA

the sin of idleness was like a clog to the neck of one who travelled the road to the City of Light—the idleness of half hours after sunset, it may be, when the fish were split, and the unrighteous rested and the wicked had their way. One winter, when he had mended his cod-trap and knitted a herring-seine and a new salmon-net, he set out to whittle the model of a schooner, thinking to sell it to Manuel of Burnt Arm, who builded five schooners every year, and to give the money to the church, to the end that, at last, Ragged Harbour might be in a fair way toward having a parson all to herself. So he whittled, and whittled, and whittled away; and while the wood took form under his fingers, even as he himself directed, yielding to his veriest whims, and gave promise of that grace and strength which he, alone of all the world, had conceived, a new, flooding joy came to him—such happiness as he had not hoped for in earth or heaven. He whittled the drear days through, and in the night, while the wind swept the hills and flung snow against the panes, he sat long in the leaping firelight, whittling still, bending ever closer over the forming thing in his hands,

IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

creeping ever nearer to the expiring blaze, and dreaming great dreams all the while. In this work his soul found vent: even, it may be said, a touch of the tiny hull—a soft, lingering touch in the night—gave a comfort which neither prayer nor fasting, nor any other thing, could bring to his unrest; and, soon, his last waking thought was not of the Lord God A'mighty, his god, as it had been, nor yet of a yawning hell, but of the thing which his hands were forming. And when the model was polished and mounted, which was in that spring when old Simon Luff's last grandson was born, he did not sell it to Manuel of Burnt Arm: for he wanted to know of his own knowledge, when he saw her afloat, that the builder of that schooner had brought her promise to its perfect fulfilment. So he determined to build her himself. She would be, he told himself, the work of his own hands: and the work would be good. In the summer he toiled hard at the fishing, and in the winter following he cut timber in the inland woods, and hauled it out with the dogs; and in three years he had the keel laid and two of the ribs set in place.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"Solomon, b'y," he confided to Solomon Stride, in a dark whisper, once, "she'll be the best sixty-tonner ever sailed these seas—once I get her done."

"She'll be over long in buildin', I be thinkin'," said Solomon.

"Oh, I doan't know's she will," Nazareth made reply. "Twill be a matter o' twelve year, maybe. But once I gets she done, Solomon—once I gets she out o' the tickle in a switch from the nor'east—once I does, b'y, she'll be a *cracker* t' goa! Iss, an' she will."

"Iss, an' I hope so," said Solomon. "But her keel'll rot afore this time twelve year."

"Iss, maybe," said Nazareth. "I be 'lowin' t' use up two kéels."

One day, old Uncle Simon Luff, rowing in from the grounds with but two fish to show for the day's jigging, turned his punt into the little cove where Nazareth was at work, and came ashore.

"They tells me," said he, "that you be goain' t' use galvanised nails for she," with a side-nod toward the schooner.

Nazareth's adze fell twice upon the timber he

IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

was dubbing. "Iss," said he. "I be goain' t' use galvanised nails. 'Tis true."

"They tells me 'twill cost a wonderful sight moare."

"I calcalate \$76.80 for nails, b'y," said Nazareth, as his adze fell again, "which is—ugh!—as you says—ugh!—a wonderful sight moare'n—ugh!—wrought nails."

Uncle Simon sat down on the keel. "What do you 'low for your spars, b'y?" he asked.

Nazareth spat on his hands, and answered while he rubbed the horny palms together. "Well, b'y, I can't cut the spars single-handed, an' they's noa good timber in these parts," he said. "But I can get un t' Burnt Arm, an' I can tow un up with the punt: which it is but a matter o' twenty mile, as you knows. I 'low \$150 for a set, an' \$12 for a main boom, an' \$4 for three gaffs an' a top-mast if I doan't cut un meself. But 'tis a long time 'til I needs un."

"Nazareth," said Uncle Simon, "what do you 'low this schooner'll cost you?"

Nazareth suspended the dubbing, and put a foot on the keel. "I be goain' t' make she a good

THE WAY OF THE SEA

schooner, Uncle Simon," he said, solemnly, "so good a schooner as ever sailed out of a ha'bour. She'll have twenty-five ribs to her body frame, which is five moare'n Manuel's *Duchess* have; an' I be goain' t' brace her bows with oak for the ice. I be goain' t' give she four sets o' clamps, an' juniper top-sides, an' two-an'-a-quarter-inch ceiling planking; an' I'll put a bolt where they's call for a bolt. She'll have her suit o' sails from Saint John's, an' I'll serve her standin' riggin', an' when it comes t' caulking I'll horse her. Uncle Simon, b'y, I 'low \$767 for her timber, an' I 'low \$550 for iron an' nails an' oakum an' windlass an' harse pipes an' all they things; an' 'twill cost me \$1,200 t' fit she out, 'lowin' I can get three anchors an' some likely chain for \$250, an' rope enough for \$80, an' a set o' blocks for \$100, an' the suit o' sails I wants for \$400. Maybe, Simon, countin' in me own labour an' what little I hire at \$900, an' gettin' me smithy wark done t' Burnt Arm for \$250, she'll cost me \$3,500 afore I take she out o' the tickle for t' try she. Simon," he concluded, his voice a-thrill with deep purpose, "she'll be the best sixty-tonner what ever sailed these seas!"

IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

“Nazareth,” said Simon, “can you do it, b’y?”

“Iss, Simon, if the Lard God A’mighty sends the seals in the spring an’ a reasonable sign o’ fish in season, I’ll do it. If the Lard God A’mighty leaves me take \$200 out o’ the sea each year—if he oan’y doos that—I’ll sail she this spring come twelve year.”

“’Tis a deal t’ expect,” said Simon, shaking his head. “S’pose the Lard cuts you down t’ \$150?”

Nazareth scratched his head in a perplexed way. “I’d sail she, I s’pose,” he said, “this spring come eighteen year.”

“Maybe,” said Simon, for he had looked back through the years he had lived. “A man can do a good spell o’ wark—in a life. But you’re lookin’ poor an’ lean, b’y,” he added. “Eat moare,” now rising to go to his punt, “an’ you’ll get a wonderful sight moare wark out o’ yourself.”

“Does you think so?” said Nazareth, looking up quickly, as though the suggestion were new and most striking.

“I knows it,” said Uncle Simon.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"Maybe, now, you're right," said Nazareth.
"I'll try it."

But at the end of twelve years, which was the time when Uncle Simon's last grandson was made a hand in the trap-skiff, the schooner was still on the stocks, though Nazareth Lute had near worn out his life with pinching and cruel work: for they were hard years, and the Lord God A'mighty, his god, had not generously rewarded the toil of men. Uncle Simon Luff, who was now surpassing old and grey, and, like a prophet, stood upon the holiness of past years, called upon the people to repent of their sins, that the Lord God A'mighty might be persuaded to withdraw his anger from them. "Yea, even," cried Uncle Simon, in one ecstasy at the meeting-house, "hunt out the Jonah among you, an' heave un out o' this here ha'bour!" Now, Nazareth Lute, believing that Uncle Simon had come to that holy age when the mouth may utter wisdom which the mind conceiveth not, searched his heart for sin, but found none; whereupon he was greatly distressed, for he thought to appease the wrath of the Lord God A'mighty with repentance, that the Lord, his god, might grant

IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

the means to make the schooner ready for launching. Nevertheless, being exceeding anxious to purge his heart of such sins as may lurk in hearts all unsuspected, he put ashes on his head for three nights, when his fire went out; for with his whole heart he longed for the Lord God A'mighty to restore his favour, that the schooner might some day be finished. And when, for three more years, the Lord God still frowned upon Ragged Harbour, he put no blame upon the Lord God A'mighty, his god, for scorning his poor propitiation, but, rather, blamed himself for having no sack-cloth at hand with which to array himself.

“ ‘They’s a good sign o’ fish t’ Round Ha’bour,” said Solomon Stride to Nazareth, in the beginning of that season, when the news first came down. “ ‘Tis like they’ll strike here. ’Twill be a gran’ cotch o’ fish this year, I’m thinkin’.”

“ Does you think so, b’y? ” said Nazareth, his face lighting up. “ Solomon, b’y, if I can oan’y get me schooner done—if I can oan’y get she done afore I dies—I’ll not be much afeered t’ face the Lard God A’mighty when I stands afore the throne.”

THE WAY OF THE SEA

“Noa, noa, lad—sure noa!”

“Solomon, when the Lard God A'mighty says t' me, ‘Nazareth Lute, what has you got t' show for the life I give you?’ I'll say, ‘O Lard God A'mighty,’ I'll say, ‘I built the fastest sixty-tonner what ever sailed these seas.’ An' he'll say, ‘Good an' faithful sarvent,’ he'll say, ‘enter into thy reward, for you done well along o' that there schooner.’ An' I been thinkin', o' late, Solomon,” Nazareth went on, letting his voice fall to a confidential whisper, “that he'll say a ward or two moare'n that. Maybe,” with a sweet, radiant smile, “he'll say, ‘Nazareth Lute,’ he'll say afore all the angels, ‘I'm proud o' you, b'y—I'm fair proud o' *you*.’”

“Iss an' he will,” said Solomon, gently, for he perceived that the strain of toil and longing had somewhat weakened Nazareth for the time. “Sure, he'll say them very words. I knows it.”

“Maybe,” said Nazareth; then, with a wise wag of his head: “’Tis hard t' tell for sure, though, just what the Lard God A'mighty will do. ’Tis wonderful hard, I'm thinkin’.”

IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

“Iss, wonderful,” said Solomon; “but ’tis sure t’ be done right.”

When Uncle Simon Luff’s last grandson had learned to loiter at the Needle Rock to make eyes at the maids as they passed, which was two years after the season of plenty, Nazareth Lute launched his schooner; and with prayer and psalm-singing and a pot of blackberry jam she was christened the *Heavenly Hope*. The days of tribulation, when the great fear of the wrath of the Lord God A’mighty descended upon Ragged Harbour, were over: again, with his whole heart, Nazareth Lute longed to lay a guiding hand upon the helm of the craft he had made—to feel the thrill of her response to the touch of his finger. Day-dreams haunted him while he worked—dreams of singing winds and a wake of froth, of a pitching, heeling flight over great waves, of swelling sails and of foam at the rail, of squalls escaped and of gales weathered in the night. In these long, sunny days, when all the rocks of the harbour cheerily echoed the noise of hammer and saw, and the smell of oakum and paint and new wood was

THE WAY OF THE SEA

in the air to delight in, he was happy: for the cloud and flame of the wrath of the Lord God A'mighty, his god, were unperceived and forgotten. In these days, too, Uncle Simon Luff puttered about the deck, a querulous, flighty, tottering old child: and sometimes he fancied he was the master-builder of the schooner, and gave orders, which Nazareth pretended to obey; and sometimes he fancied she was at sea in a gale, and roared commands, at which times it was hard to soothe him to quiet. But Nazareth Lute delighted in the company and in the prattle, from sunny day to sunny day, while he rigged the boat: for he did not know that a revelation impended and might come by the lips of old Simon Luff—the inevitable, crushing revelation of his idolatrous departure from the one path of escape.

“Nazareth,” said Uncle Simon, crossly, one day, when Nazareth was caulking the forward deck planks, “I told you t’ horse them planks, an’ you isn’t doin’ it.”

“Iss, I is, Uncle Simon, b’y,” said Nazareth, looking up with a smile. “I be drivin’ the oakum in thick an’ tight.”

IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

"Noa, you isn't!" said Uncle Simon, in a rage.

"Iss, b'y, sure——"

Uncle Simon sprang away. He straightened himself to his full stature and lifted up his right hand. His long, white hair fell over his shoulders, his white beard quivered, and his eyes flashed.

"Nazareth Lute," he cried, "you loves this here schooner moare'n you loves the Lard God A'mighty."

Nazareth's mallet clattered harshly on the deck. It had fallen from his grasp, for the strength had gone out of his hands. He rose, trembling.

"Take them wards back, Simon," he said, hoarsely. "Take un back, b'y," he pleaded. "They isn't true."

"Iss, an' they is true," Simon grumbled. "This here schooner's your golden calf. The Lard God A'mighty'll punish you for lovin' she moare'n you love him."

The cloud and flame of the wrath of the Lord God A'mighty seemed very near to Nazareth. In a dazed way he watched old Simon totter to the side and climb into his punt: watched him row out from the ship.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

“Simon,” he called, earnestly, “say ’tisn’t true—what you said.”

“’Tis an’ ’tis, an’ can’t be ’tiser,” said Simon.

Nazareth was struck a mortal blow.

When the light failed that night, and there remained but the wan light of the stars to guide the work of his hands, Nazareth Lute put aside his mallet and his oakum; and he stretched himself out on the forward deck, with his face upturned, that he might ponder again, in the night’s silence, the words of Simon Luff: for Simon was old, very old and white-haired; and he had lived a long life without sin, as men knew, and had at last come to those days wherein strange inspirations and communications are vouchsafed to holy men. And Nazareth fell asleep—while from the stars to the shimmering water and from the sea’s misty rim to the first shrubs and shadows of the wilderness the infinite hymned the praise of great works, he fell asleep; and while star and shadow and misty water still joined with the wilderness and great rocks in the enravishing strain, he dreamed a dream: a dream of the Lord God A’mighty, who

IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

appeared in a glowing cloud above him. Now, the words of the Lord God A'mighty, his god, whom he had made in his blindness of tempest and naked rock and the sea's hard wrath, I here, in all compassion for Nazareth Lute, set down as they were told to him by one who told them to me.

"Nazareth Lute!" said the Lord God A'mighty.

"Here I be, O Lard," said Nazareth Lute.

The glowing cloud was a cloud of changing colours—of gold and purple and grey and all sunset tints; and, of a sudden, it melted from gold to grey.

"Nazareth Lute!" said the Lord God A'mighty.

Now, Nazareth Lute trembled exceedingly, for he knew that the Lord God A'mighty, his god, had come in wrath to reprove him for his idolatry; and he was afraid.

"Here I be, O Lard," he made answer.

But the Lord withheld his voice for a time, and Nazareth knew that he was frowning in the grey cloud.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

“Nazareth Lute!” said the Lord God A’mighty, for the third time.

“Iss, Lard,” said Nazareth Lute. “’Tis Nazareth a-speakin’. Does you not know me, Lard?”

“Oh, I knows you, never fear,” said the Lord God A’mighty.

“Sure, you does, O Lard,” said Nazareth. “I been sarvin’ you ever since that day I seen you sittin’ on Yellow Rock, by the tickle t’ Seldom Cove. You knows *me*, Lard.”

Then a drear silence: and round about was deep night, but the light of the crimson cloud fell upon the shrouds, and upon the thrice-dubbed planks of the deck, and upon the mallet near by; so the man knew that he was yet upon the deck of his own schooner, and he was comforted.

“Scuttle this here fore-an’-after,” said the Lord God A’mighty.

Now, for a time, Nazareth Lute had no voice to plead against the command of the Lord God A’mighty; for he knew that the words of the Lord stand forever.

“O Lard,” he cried out, at last, “leave me sail she once—just once, O Lard God A’mighty!”

IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

The cloud of changing colours hung in its place; but no words fell upon the waiting ears of Nazareth Lute.

“O Lard,” he cried, “leave me put her sails on, an’ sell she, an’ give the money t’ the church!”

But the cloud of changing colours made no answer: but the very silence was an answer.

“O Lard,” said Nazareth Lute, braving the anger of the Lord, “leave me keep she. Leave me let she ride at anchor an’ rot—but leave me keep she by me.”

Still the cloud of changing colours kept silence.

“O Lard,” said Nazareth Lute, for his heart was breaking, and he no longer feared the wrath of the Lord God A’mighty, “’tisn’t fair—sure, ’tisn’t fair. She’ve been well builded, O Lard. She’d be the best sixty-tonner in these parts. Why, O Lard, must I scuttle——”

“Nazareth Lute, does you hear me?”

“Iss, Lard; but——”

“Nazareth Lute,” cried the Lord God A’mighty from the depths of the black cloud, “’tis not for wrigglin’ worms t’ know the mysteries o’ the heaven an’ o’ the earth. An’ you doan’t scuttle

THE WAY OF THE SEA

this here fore-an'-after she'll wreck on her first v'y'ge, an' all hands'll loss themselves. Mind that, Nazareth Lute!"

Whereupon, the cloud of changing colours vanished, and all things were as they had been when the daylight failed—from the stars to the shimmering water, and from the sea's misty rim to the first shrubs and shadows of the wilderness. But the hymn in praise of great works fell upon the ears of a numb soul.

Now, Nazareth Lute told no man what the Lord God A'mighty, his god, had commanded him to do: and from year to year, continuing, he toiled early and late, as he had done before, that his schooner might be a great and perfect work before he died; but he dreamed no more dreams of swelling sails and a wake of froth. On the night when Uncle Simon Luff's last grandson's first child was born, which was long after Uncle Simon's feet had grown used to the streets of the City of Light, as men said, Nazareth went to Solomon Stride's cottage, under the Man-o'-War, to talk a while; for old Solomon lay ill abed, and

IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

Nazareth's work was done. The shadows were then stealing out of the wilderness upon the heels of the sun's red glory, and behind lurked the dusk and a clammy mist. 4

"Draw the curtains back, b'y," said Solomon. "Leave us see the sun sink in the sea. 'Tis a gran' sight."

The rim of the sea was a flaring red and gold; a great, solemn glory filled all the sky.

"They tells me," said Solomon, after a time, "that you got the suit o' sails from Saint John's by the last mail-boat."

"Iss, b'y," said Nazareth. "I fitted un on a week gone Toosday. Me wark's done, b'y. The schooner's finished. She've been lyin' off Mad Mull for five days—over fifteen fathom o' water at low tide."

"She've been well builded, Nazareth. She've been well builded."

"Iss—the best sixty-tonner in these parts. I made she that, Solomon, as I said I would."

"Looks like us'll have a switch from the nor'-east the morrow," said Solomon. "'Tis like you'll try she then."

THE WAY OF THE SEA

“Noa, Solomon.”

“’Twill be a gran’ wind, I’m thinkin’, b’y.”

But, while the gloaming shadows gathered over the harbour water, Nazareth told Solomon Stride of the vision in which the Lord God A’mighty, his god, had appeared to him; and when he was done, the dusk had driven the flush of pink in upon the sun and was pressing upon the red and gold at the edge of the world.

“’Twere not the Lard a-speakin’,” Solomon cried. “’Twere not, b’y—’twere not!”

“Does you think not, Solomon?” said Nazareth, softly. “But you forgets about the sacrifice an’ propitiation for sin.”

“’Tweren’t the Lard!” said Solomon.

“You forgets, Solomon,” said Nazareth, in all simplicity, “that I seed the Lard once afore, a-sittin’ there on Yellow Rock. Iss, b’y, I seed un once afore, an’ now I knows un when I sees un. ’Twere he, b’y—iss, ’twere.”

“’Twere not the Lard said them wards,” said Solomon.

“You forgets, Solomon,” said Nazareth, “that the Lard God A’mighty sung out t’ Abraham, one

IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

day, an' told un t' offer up Isaac as a burnt offer-in'. T' offer up his son, Solomon—t' offer up his *son*! He've oan'y asked a schooner o' me."

"Iss, Nazareth, he done that," said Solomon. "But he sent an angel in time t' save that poor lad's life."

"Iss," said Nazareth, as in a dream, "he sent an angel."

The night, advancing swiftly, thrust the last sunset colour over the rim of the sea; and it was dark.

"Solomon," said Nazareth, "for four nights I been on the deck o' that there schooner, watchin' for the angel o' the Lard, but none come. Solomon," he faltered, "I been waitin', an' waitin', an' waitin', but the Lard God A'mighty sends noa angel—t' me."

"Did the new day come?" said Solomon, earnestly, lifting himself on his elbow.

"Iss, the new day come."

"Seems t' me, Nazareth," said Solomon, "that the dear Lard peeps out o' every dawn t' bless us poor folk."

"Noa, noa," Nazareth groaned; "the Lard God

THE WAY OF THE SEA

A'mighty was not in them dawns, nor yet the angel o' the Lard; for I kep' a sharp lookout, an' I'd 'a' seed un if they was there. Noa, noa, b'y," he went on, speaking with rising firmness, "he've asked a sacrifice o' me, an' he means t' have me make it. She've been fitted out with all the things she needs—to her cask-dipper, b'y, an' her buzzie an' anchor-light. I've painted her sides, an' swabbed down her deck, an' made she all neat an' trim an' shipshape. She's all ready t' be offered up—all ready, now. I'm fair sad t' think—but—I'm goain' t'——"

"What do it all matter?" said Solomon, falling back on his pillow, wearied out. "What do it matter so's a man trys t' please the dear Lard in all he doos?"

"Iss, Solomon," said Nazareth, "what do it all matter, so's a man oan'y saves his soul from the fires o' hell?"

And Nazareth went out: and in that night he scuttled his schooner, even as he believed the Lord God A'mighty, his god, had commanded him to do.

A BEAT T' HARBOUR

Chapter IX

A BEAT T' HARBOUR

RAGGED HARBOUR wondered what the Lord God Almighty intended. It was a great gale—a wild, wet gale from the nor'east, grey by day and driving black by night: noisy all the while with breaking water and the swish and moan of winds rushing in from the sea. On the night of the third day, a madcap gust clanged the church bell three times; whereupon, the children of the inner harbour awoke and whimpered, and some men left their beds in fear, wondering if the Lord God Almighty had summoned them to prayer by a sign. It was a great gale—a black, roaring wind from the nor'east; but on the fifth night of it Thomas Crew, a punt fisherman of Finger Cove, which lies beyond Mad Mull, still sat rocking before the kitchen fire, staring at the coals and the knotty floor and the shadows in the corners, waiting for

THE WAY OF THE SEA

what might happen in the room above, where the women-folk would not let him go. By-and-by he fell into a play with words, as his habit was; and he fashioned this, while he rocked and stared and waited: "Now, the wind is the hand o' the Lard, without pity an' wonderful for strength; it holds the punts from the harbour tickle an' gives the bodies o' strong men t' the lop o' the grounds. Ay, the wind is the hand o' the Lard, strange as the ways o' the Lard: tender it is, as the hand o' the mother o' sons; it lifts the hair from the brow of a child, an' strokes the cheek of a wee babe with a cool touch. Lay thy hand upon me, O Lard, as upon the head of a sick child! Hold Thou me not back from the shelter o' harbour, lest the waters o' the sea get me!" Thus, and on, while the gale, in the worst of its mood, lashed the cottage with spray from the breakers under the window and tore away to the wilderness.

"Listen, Skipper Tommy, zur!" said Aunt Esther, appearing of a sudden in the kitchen door.

Thomas heard a new sound—a cry not of the gale: a wail, for which he had long waited.

"'Tis a son, zur!"

A B E A T T ' H A R B O U R

"An' the child shall be called Daniel," Skipper Thomas told the red coals in the stove.

"Hut!" Aunt Esther snorted. "'Twill be noa such old-fashioned name for that wee babe. I'm thinkin' the name o' *that* child will be Claud."

"An' the child," Thomas whispered to the coals, "shall be called Daniel; for Daniel was the bravest man in the world."

So Dannie Crew was born and given a name.

I

Tick, tock! tick, tock! tick, tock! went the clock; and Dannie Crew listened to the clock. Skipper Thomas sat at one side of the kitchen fire, sunk in an arm-chair, his stockinged feet stretched out; his glance rested dreamily on the red coals in the stove. Dannie sat at the other side, stiffly upright in a straight-backed chair, his feet on the upper rung and his hands gripped in his lap; he was staring round-eyed at the red coals in the stove. Tick, tock! tick, tock! Dannie wished that the noises of the night could not obscure the serene tick, tock! tick, tock! of the clock. It was the night of another gale—a doleful spring wind, dry and gusty,

THE WAY OF THE SEA

following rain: it drove tattered black clouds over a sky wherein the grey light of evening still strangely lingered; it fled moaning from the sea to the wilderness. Tick, tock! tick, tock! Dannie had rather listen to the clock. The sea was breaking under the window: a low hiss, rising sharply to an angry swish; a thud, a sigh—and a space of silence. Tick, tock! tick, tock! went the clock; and Dannie listened to it. The sea was driving into the long hole in Split Rock; when the wind lulled, the noise of gurgle and coughing sounded above the crash of the waters under the window. But tick, tock! went the clock; and Dannie listened to the clock. Tick, tock! and the roar and crackling of the fire and the click, click, click! of his mother's knitting-needles: these were known and friendly voices; so Dannie listened to them. Tick, tock! click, click, click! and the snoring blaze! But the far-off moan and the hissing under the window and the choking cough could not altogether be shut out from the quiet tick, tock! of the little clock. Every blast of the gale that flung spray against the window gave Dannie Crew a new fright.

“ 'Tis time t' goa t' bed, lad,” said his mother.

Dannie looked swiftly about the room—but not

A B E A T T ' H A R B O U R

at the clock: rather, at last, he looked through the window to the night.

"The light is yellow in the kitchen," he whispered, "an' the window-panes is black. Iss, mum; 'tis time."

"'Tis a queer way t' say it," said the mother; but Skipper Thomas smiled, as though he understood.

"The things o' the night," said Dannie, staring at the black window, "is abroad in the night. 'Tis time for folk t' stow their little lads in bed."

"Dannie, b'y," Skipper Thomas asked, his voice melting with affection, "has you been harkin' t' the gale?"

"Ay, zur," Dannie replied. "'Tis a wild gale. God's wonderful mad, the night."

"Ay?"

"He've let the wind loose t' cotch wicked men."

Skipper Thomas laughed outright—smile swiftly passing to chuckle and long guffaw. Indeed, he delighted in his son!

"Ay?" he said, bending twinkling eyes upon the boy.

"An' the schooners flee from the gale like rabbits from the black pack behind."

"Ay, the winds is loose upon the sea."

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"An' the skippers," was Dannie's response, "is afeared in their hearts."

Skipper Thomas could contain himself no longer. He threw his arms wide open to the lad.

"Dannie!" he cried.

Little Dannie slipped from his chair and ran to his father's knee: he put his breast against the broader breast; he wound his arms around his father's neck, and locked his hands; he laid his cheek against the bushy brown beard.

"Fawther!" he whispered.

Skipper Thomas held the lad close; and Dannie was very happy, for he was not afraid of the wind and the night any more. Tick, tock! went the clock. Tick, tock! tick, tock! Dannie then heard nothing but the clock. And, well, there they sat—the son in the father's arms; and for a long time they watched the red coals in the stove, the one dreaming of gales weathered, the other of gales to come.

At last, the twinkle returned to Skipper Thomas's eyes. He disengaged Dannie's hands, and sat him back at arm's length.

A B E A T T' H A R B O U R

"Tell me," he said, with a wink, "does you hear the sea in the hoale at Split Rock?"

"Oh, ay, zur!"

Dannie's eyes flashed. A flush of delight crept into his cheeks. He knew *that* game.

"An' what's it like?"

" 'Tis like Granfer Luff when he coughs blood, zur."

"Does you hear the wind in the woods?"

" 'Tis like the howl of a dog in the night."

"Hut!" cried Skipper Thomas, pretending deep disgust. " 'Tis a wonderful mixture, that! Tell me, now: what have the howl of a dog t' do with Granfer Luff's cough?"

Dannie flushed. " 'Tis true, zur," he said, quietly. "Twere not well said. Leave us start over again."

"Does you hear the sea in the hoale at Split Rock?"

" 'Tis like Granfer Luff when he coughs blood."

"An' the wind in the woods?"

" 'Tis his sigh an' groan in the night, zur," Dannie flashed.

"Oh, ay, that's fine!" Skipper Thomas exclaimed. "An' does you hear the breakers under the window?"

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"Ay, zur," Dannie answered, his eyes brightening as the reply took form. "'Tis the thud o' clods on his coffin—the thud o' clods that fall—from spades—t'—t'—graves." Now sure of the words, he repeated, in a voice fallen to a whisper: "'Tis the thud o' clods on his coffin—the thud o' clods that fall from the spades o' men t' the hollow grave."

"'Tis fine!" the father cried.

"'Tis not bad, at all," Dannie agreed, with a wag of the head.

"'Tis *wonderful* fine," Skipper Thomas repeated, softly, "for a wee child like you. You'll be knowin' so much about words as your fawther when you is so old as he."

"Oh, ay, zur—moare, zur," said Dannie.

In the silence, a furious blast of the gale shook the house and went screaming past; and as it went it whipped the black window-panes with spray from the breakers. For Dannie Crew, the noises of the night had now a clearer meaning—the sighs of the sick and the groans of the dying; so he shivered, for he was afraid.

"I'll play noa moare, zur," he whispered.

A B E A T T ' H A R B O U R

Round went the hands of the clock—a circle of the dial; and Dannie Crew still lay quiet in his father's arms.

"'Tis late," the Skipper whispered in his ear. "Is you afeared t' goa t' bed alone, the night?"

"Noa!" Dannie cried, angrily. "I isn't afeared." He threw his father's arms off, and wriggled to his feet. "Leave me have your slicker, zur, an' I'll sleep this night on Flat Rock—outside, in the dark, where the spray falls."

"Hut, hut! Come, now——"

"I isn't afeared," Dannie boasted. "I isn't afeared o' the hands o' the sea," the voice falling. "I isn't afeared o' the spirits that ride the winds o' night," with a wide-eyed glance about. Then, in a poor whimper, "I isn't afeared o' anything."

The click, click, click! of the knitting-needles stopped. Dannie's mother drew in her chin and looked over her great round spectacles.

"What's this?" she demanded.

"'Tis nothin', mum," Skipper Thomas made haste to answer.

Janet Crew smiled to see the angry light in the blue eyes of her son, the red blood in his cheeks, his head thrown proudly back, his sturdy body drawn

THE WAY OF THE SEA

straight and tall—the splendid flash and flush and quiver of indignation.

“Come kiss me, b’y!” said she.

The kiss given, Dannie returned to his father, scowling. “I isn’t afeared,” he pouted.

Skipper Thomas caught the boy in his arms again. “Yes, you is,” he whispered. “I knows you is. I feels you quiver all over. You’d not dare sleep on Flat Rock this night. But an you truly wants to, I’ll leave you take my slicker. Sh-h-hh!” still lowering his voice. “I’ll slip you out the front door when you gets underweigh for bed. She’ll know nothin’ about it. An’ will you sleep there the night, b’y?”

Dannie buried his face in the brown whiskers.

“Come, lad,” Skipper Thomas pleaded, “tell your ol’ fawther that you’d sleep on Flat Rock an he’d let you!”

There was no word from Dannie.

“Tell un you’re not afeared o’ the night an’ the sea, woan’t you, lad?”

Dannie was still silent.

“Woan’t you?”

Skipper Thomas waited for the answer. Tick, tock! tick, tock! tick, tock! went the clock. Click,

A B E A T T' H A R B O U R

click, click, click! went the knitting-needles. The fire roared. Without, the sea coughed and spluttered in the hole at Split Rock; the wind fled moaning to the wilderness; the breakers hissed and swished and thundered under the window. Dannie Crew listened to the quiet tick, tock! tick, tock! of the little clock while he lay trembling on his father's breast.

"I'm thinkin' I'll goa t' bed, now," he whispered, at last, "for I'm fair tired an' sleepy."

Skipper Thomas led him away to bed.

When Skipper Thomas had stowed away his little lad, he came down to the fire again, with never a word; and he sighed many times, while he watched the glowing coals turn grey: for, now that he saw the end of the road, which, indeed, he himself had found hard on the march, he repented that he had led his son into that path. Upstairs, Dannie was talking to himself—still giving form to strange thoughts of the wind and of the sea, though he should long, long ago have been sound asleep: they could hear him in the kitchen. Skipper Thomas tip-toed up to Dannie's room, and peered in.

"Isn't you asleep, yet?" he whispered.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"Noa, zur," Dannie answered, excitedly, from the darkness. "I'm thinkin' wonderful things, this night."

Skipper Thomas lay down on the bed. It was dark. Dannie snuggled close to him, and felt about for his hand.

"'Tis fine," said he, "'t' think o' many words."

Skipper Thomas wondered how best to give the warning that was in his mind.

"The Bible's chock full o' them," Dannie went on. "'Tis wonderful how the parson reads un out."

"Oh, ay, wonderful," Skipper Thomas agreed.

"An' 'tis queer, sir," said Dannie, now puzzled, "that oan'y you an' me knows about the fun o' playin' with words."

"Oan'y you an' me," Skipper Thomas repeated, absently.

"O' all the world," said Dannie.

"O' all the whole world, lad. But I'm thinkin'," Skipper Thomas went on, now sure of what he must say, "that 'tis not wise t' think too much about words. 'Tis like, now, that 'tis a sin t' do so."

A B E A T T ' H A R B O U R

Dannie's hand closed tightly upon his father's fingers. The man flinched from the meaning of that clasp.

"Oh, ay," he said, nevertheless, "I'm thinkin' 'tis a sin t' fancy things. The good Lard made words for talkin' with—not for makin' fancies. I'm thinkin' that fancies make cowards o' men. 'Tis the way the Lard punishes the sin."

"Does you think I'm a coward, fawther?" Dannie asked, tremulously.

"Maybe not yet, lad."

"Nor will be, sure, zur!"

"The wind," Skipper Thomas went on, "is but the wind; it lies in wait for noa man. The sea is but water; it has noa hands t' stretch out. Nor wind, nor sea, nor fog, nor night, hate men. But they'll cotch you, sure, an you is afeared o' them."

"I isn't afeared."

"Not yet."

"I'll l'arn t' sail, zur," Dannie said, quickly, "an' they'll not be able t' cotch me, then."

"'Twould be better t' stop thinkin' so much about words. Then you'll not fear they things."

"I isn't able, zur."

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"An' you'll not try?"

"I'd rather be clever at sailin', zur," Dannie said, after a silence. "Will it not do?"

"Oh, well!" Skipper Thomas sighed.

II

Oh, well! Dannie Crew grew up a fine, brown lad—straight, sturdy, agile: merry in sunshine, wistful at twilight, ever grave and furtive when the grey winds were abroad. The maids who made eyes at him from the shade of their hands on the flakes marked the saucy poise of his head, the gleam and curl of his yellow hair, the depth and changing light of his eye; and they said, each to her fluttering heart, that he was a fine lad, indeed, for he was both strong and bonnie. But he had only a nod and a jolly wink for them—no swift, warm glance, no low word in passing, no caress on the dusky roads; nothing but a nod and a wink and a ticklish shaft of rhyme. There are things more to be desired in idle hours than the flash in the eyes of maids and the touch of moist lips; there is the Space and Silence of the great Heads, lifted high, where the sunlight lies thick upon the moss and the warm

A B E A T T' H A R B O U R

wind goes scampering over the sea to the far-off mist—silence and blue space and the Book in hand: whence sounding words, whence inspiration. By the magic of sunshine and blue day, lads may flit away on silver wings, to wander, as they will, in the places of quiet delight which lie beyond the curtain of mist. But, O little Dreamer of the Wistful Heart, the dream is of the moment! The silver wings are given, and taken away; the quiet gardens and the palace vanish, as at the waving of a wand. Crack! goes the whip. An' 'tis, Up, men, an' t' the day's march! Crack! goes the whip; and the way is close-hedged upon either hand. Far, far beyond the blue mist, whither, it may be, your road leads, lie the Rocks o' Wrecked Ships—in a sea all black and white, under low, grey skies, where the wind tears in upon the breakers from the frothy open.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

III

*Lukie's punt were painted green,
The finest boat that ever was seen ;
Lukie's punt had cotton sails,
A juniper rudder an' galvanised nails!*

That was Dannie Crew's first song. They sang it from Ragged Harbour to Twillingate and to the Cape Norman Light—ay, carried it north to Cape Chudleigh in the schooners of the summer fleet; and they sing it yet. Came then (with many another) the Song of the Pirate Mate:

*Sure, the Skipper went ashore,
Fol de rol, fol de rol !
When we made the Labrador,
Fol de rol !
An' the mate he said, " Stand by !
Us'll leave un there t' die."
An' the Skipper never sailed her any moare.*

*An' the Skipper never sailed her any moare, heigh-oh !
An' the Skipper never sailed her any moare.*

A B E A T T ' H A R B O U R

To this day they roar it in the forecastles when the anchor's down and the wind blows in the night without. Then, too, when a fall gale drove the Starlight and Star Bright, twin schooners, ashore at Grey Rocks, with all hands lost—men took the mangled bodies from the breakers when the sea went down—a new song was made. Dannie Crew called it “The Loss o’ All,” and, in part, it ran:

*When the schooner struck the rock
She was splintered by the shock ;
An’ the breakers didn’t ask for leave or token,
But they hove un, man an’ kid,
Slap ag’in’ the rock, they did,
An’ kep’ heavin’ till the bones of all was broken!*

Thus, and on—songs merry and sad: all fitted to the old West Country tunes, which had long survived the generation that brought them over. Dannie was happy when he was making songs.

They were at the fishing—far off-shore, in the punt.

“Dannie, lad,” said Skipper Thomas, “what you thinkin’ about?”

“I were oan’y wishin’, zur,” Danny answered.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"Was you, now? An' what might it be about?"

Dannie looked away to the blue loom of Indian Island and the windless spaces out to sea.

"Jus' wishin'," said he.

"Tell your fawther, lad, woan't you?"

"Jus' wishin'," said Dannie, as his eyes moved absently over the rocks and breakers of Break-Heart Point, "that folk would buy songs."

Skipper Thomas guffawed.

"An they done that," the lad went on with a broad smile, "I'd do nothin' at all but make un. But," he added, wistfully, "'tis fish the traders wants—not songs. So I were wishin', too, zur, that I might spend the days makin' boots. Look, you! an men would oan'y cotch fish for *me*, I'd make boots for *them*. Why not? Sure, soon I'd be so clever at makin' boots that I'd be able t' make grand ones. Then," again wistfully, "I could stay ashoare."

"'Tis not the way o' the world, b'y."

"I wisht it was."

"But a man must cotch his own fish an' make his own boots."

"I wisht he didn't."

A B E A T T ' H A R B O U R

"But he have."

"Ay, 'less he goa sailin' in the traders; an' I'm thinkin' that's what I'll do, zur, when I'm well growed. I'm wantin', zur," said Dannie, the light of high ambition in his eyes, "t' be a great man—so great as they is. I'm wantin' men t' say, 'There goas Daniel Crew!' An you'll let me, zur, I'll be the skipper of a schooner—the master of a hundred tonner!"

The aspiration thrilled Skipper Thomas with fatherly pride. When he looked back from the farthest sea, his face was flushed and his eyes were shining.

"Let you, laddie!" he cried. "Sure, I'll help you all I'm able. But 'tis a wonderful hard undertakin', this; they isn't many tradin' skippers——"

"Oh, ay," Dannie interrupted, his chest swelling, "but I'm a clever hand at sailin', an' I'll be one."

It was now the end of day; so they stowed the catch, reeled the lines, hauled up the grapnel, unfurled the sails; and they caught the evening breeze back to the harbour tickle. The dusk had gathered, then—the flush fled from the western sky; the punts

THE WAY OF THE SEA

were slipping in from the shadows with a gentle wind. From far off—from some place deep in the night they had left—drifting in from the quiet sea, came the chorus of a song that Dannie knew: came drifting, from some place far off.

“Hist, fawther!”

Skipper Thomas lifted the scull oar from the water, lest the swirl and drip obscure the wandering harmony.

“ ’Tis my song!” Dannie sobbed. “ ’Tis a song o’ *mine!*”

For a long time they listened to that song, as it came drifting in over the water—staring, all the while, out into the deepening shadows.

“Dannie, lad,” said the father, softly, “what you thinkin’ about?”

“Jus’ wishin’!” said the boy.

Well, as you may know, in the course of years Dan Crew was made a skipper. Cook’s boy to cook, to hand, to mate, to skipper: in the course of years, it came to pass. In the fall of the year, Luke Dart o’ Boot Harbour gave him the Early Bird, then on the stocks and bound north, in the spring, to trade

A B E A T T' H A R B O U R

the ports of the Labrador. Dan Crew, now with a tawny beard, spent that winter at home; and he was proud enough—as you may know.

“*I’m* Skipper Dan Crew!”

Many’s the time he said that to himself.

IV

The Early Bird met a month of dirty weather—foggy gales from the nor’east, with a restless, spumy sea; days of sweeping rain, black nights: stress for the ship, toil and fret for the skipper. When she put into Boot Harbour at the end of it, Luke Dart thanked God and ordered her hull painted. Skipper Dan was thin, blear-eyed, quiet-spoken. He took punt for Ragged Harbour with three days’ leave; but Tommy Tutt, the clerk, made straight for Luke Dart’s little office in the rear of the shop, and he closed the door after him. “Skipper Luke, zur,” he snapped, with a frown and an angry nod, “*I’m* come t’ tell *you* that I’ll sail noa moare along o’ Skipper Dan Crew.”

“What’s this, Tutt, b’y?” said Skipper Luke, meeting frown with frown. “She’s a wonderful fine craft, that Early Bird.”

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"'Tis not that, zur. Give me a flour-sieve with Bill Lisson t' skipper it an' I'll goa look for the North Pole; but I'll goa noa moare from Boot Harbour past Mother Burke along o' Skipper Dan Crew."

Skipper Luke sat back in his chair. "Isn't he able t' handle she?" he asked.

"Lord, zur!" Tutt burst out. "Handle she, is it? Why, zur, he's a dry nurse t' that there schooner. Lord, zur!" in another burst, "they's nar a man on the coast, I'm thinkin', can handle a schooner with Dan Crew. Sure, she haven't a trick he don't know (an' she can be saucy enough when she've the mind); nor is they a sea that can slap her or a gust that can dip her when Skipper Dan's t' the wheel. If 'tis t' make harbour, he'll carry on sail with any crack-brained skipper o' the fleet. 'Reef?' says he t' me. 'Not with this gale chasin' us! I'm wantin' t' make harbour.' But I'm thinkin' 'twould be better an he didn't look so much t' the wind an' the sea. Lord, zur, he calls the wind the Black Pack; an' says he, once, zur, ' 'Tis cold in the Sea's arms.' " Tutt looked over his shoulder to make sure that the door was closed. "I'm thinkin'," he added, "that he's——"

A B E A T T' H A R B O U R

"Go on, b'y," said Skipper Luke.

"'Tis nothin' ag'in' his seamanship that I'd say."

The men looked into each other's eyes. "I knows what you means," said the skipper.

"Sure, zur," Tutt went on, "he's one o' they skip-pers that tries t' sail their vessels single-handed. 'Tis one thing t' be a hand (an' a good hand he was); but 'tis another thing t' be a skipper. He'll trust nobody. 'Tis prance an' dance fore an' aft with un from dawn t' dark. In a beat t' harbour, 'tis, 'Tutt, b'y, lay a hand t' the wheel while I goes for-ard, an' jam her down lively when I sings hard-a-lee.' Then, sure, he's noa sooner for'ard than 'tis, 'Mannie, b'y, you got her too close t' Sunken Reef. Sing hard-a-lee when I gets back t' the wheel.' So back he comes, zur, on the run, with sweat on his forehead, an' his eyes hangin' out. 'Tut,' says he, 'gi'me that wheel!'"

"Oh, ay," said the skipper, with a smile.

"In a gale, zur," Tutt continued, his excitement growing, "he do be a most wonderful sight—in the most or'nary switch o' wind that ever blowed. Sure, 'tis, 'My God, Tutt, we'll lose her! They's moare

THE WAY OF THE SEA

wind in them clouds back there.' Or, 'tis, 'My God, Tutt, some o' them big seas will cotch us! They's growin' bigger an' bigger. We got t' get out o' this.' 'Tis, 'What'll us do, Tutt?' all day long; an' when I tells un what t' do," Tutt concluded, with a quick frown, "he does just what suits un best."

Skipper Luke laughed. He was an old man; he had known many skippers—ay, many, many skippers.

"Oh, ay, laugh, zur!" cried the clerk. "I've met skippers like Dan Crew afore this, an' I knows what they can do; but if you'd lost your sleep o' nights like me you wouldn't laugh. 'Tis not the gales, zur, that's troublin' me; 'tis the sleep o' nights. Does you mind them Yankee barometers you give me t' sell, zur? Well, I sold un all but one, an' that one I hung on the cabin bulkhead for me-self. 'Twas a foolish thing t' do; for Skipper Dan kept comin' back in the night t' ask me how she stood.

"'Sure, Dan,' says I, 'you got the ship's glass for'ard.'

"'Oh, ay,' says he, 'but he might goa wrong.'

A B E A T T ' H A R B O U R

“’Tis my belief, zur, that if Dan Crew had a gross o’ glasses he’d look at un every one an’ goa mad if they didn’t agree. Whatever, back he’d come in the night, zur, an’ sing out down t’ companion t’ know how the Yankee was doin’. ‘Skipper Dan, zur,’ says I, ‘’tis risin’ nicely,’ or, ‘Skipper Dan, zur, ’tis holdin’ its own,’ or, ‘Skipper Dan, zur, sure it looks like a bit of a blow.’ An’ then I’d get back in me bunk an’ damn that Yankee glass most scandalous.

“‘My God, Tutt,’ I’d hear un say, if the glass was fallin’, ‘they’s a wonderful gale brewin’ this night! The fo’c’s’le glass is droppin’ like lead.’

“‘They was always a gale brewin’ with Skipper Dan; an’, sure, afore we got t’ Lancy-Loop I was fair sick an’ tired hearin’ about it. So I up an’ heaves my glass over the side. That night (we was lyin’ in Shallow Harbour, an’ a quiet night), he comes back, as usual.

“‘They’s an awful gale brewin’, b’y,’ says he. ‘We’ll have wonderful dirty weather on the run t’ Yellow Cove the morrow.’ Then, t’was, ‘Tutt, b’y, how’s that Yankee glass?’

“‘Well, Dan,’ says I, ‘’tis low enough.’

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"I couldn't see un, for 'twas deep dark; but I listened t' hear how he'd take it, an' I heard un cotch his breath.

" 'What's that?' says he.

" ' 'Tis low enough,' says I. 'Twas never so low afore.'

" 'Low enough?' says he.

" 'Ay,' says I, 'low enough, for I hove un over-board.'

" 'My God,' he whimpers, 'I've but one glass left!'

"Then he went for'ard. I don't know what he done; but the crew told me in the marnin' that he groaned a wonderful lot in his sleep that night. Now, zur," Tutt concluded, "I'm not sot on big gales, an' I'm not sot on moun-tain-eous seas, an' I'm not sot on the neighbourhood o' sunken rocks any moare'n Skipper Dan is; but I *am* sot on gettin' me full allowance o' sleep, an' I'm blowed if I'll lie awake o' nights thinkin' o' gales afore they comes, or look for rocks where they isn't charted. Skipper Luke, zur, I isn't that kind of a man; an' so I won't sail along o' Skipper Dan Crew noa moare."

A B E A T T ' H A R B O U R

"'Tis like, now," the skipper drawled, "that you'd not be afeared t' sail along o' Skipper Dan if the trade in Yankee barometers was cut off."

"Afeared!" screamed Tutt.

"Ay, you wouldn't be——"

"Lord, zur," Tutt gasped, "after that I'll sail along o' nobody else!"

Nor would he.

Late that night, Skipper Thomas, the punt fisherman, and Skipper Dan, the master of the Early Bird, sat before the kitchen fire, in the cottage at Finger Cove, out of Ragged Harbour; and they dreamed heavily, as they used to do, while they watched the wood blaze and burn to red coals in the stove—while they listened to the crackling of the fire and to the click, click, click, click! of Janet Crew's busy knitting-needles and to the old tick, tock! tick, tock! tick, tock! of the little clock. It was a quiet night: the wind had fallen away; the sea was whispering under the window.

"You fetched she back, Dannie, lad, didn't you?" Skipper Thomas said, looking up.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"Oh, ay, fawther," Dannie answered, "I fetched she back all safe."

Thomas wagged his head and smiled. "Ah, Dannie," said he, "the skipper fetched his schooner back. 'Tis a fine thing t' do!"

"Ay, zur," said Dannie, leaning over to pat the old man's knee, "every man o' the crew an' every splinter o' the ship."

"'Twas a wonderful clever thing t' do—through all them gales."

"Hark t' that, mother!" Dannie cried. "Skipper Thomas Crew o' Finger Cove says your son is a wonderful clever skipper."

Janet let her knitting fall to her lap. She, too, smiled as she looked the stalwart Dannie over.

"My son," said she, "is a clever skipper."

"A *wonderful* clever skipper, mum, says Skipper Thomas Crew."

"My son," Janet repeated, lingering upon each word, that she might the better express her pride, "is a wonderful clever skipper. *My* son is a—wonderful—clever—skipper!"

"Dannie, lad!"

"Ay, zur?"

A B E A T T ' H A R B O U R

Skipper Thomas laid his hand on Dannie's knee. He was not smiling now.

"You're likin' it well enough, isn't you, lad?" he asked.

"Oh, fine, zur!"

"He's likin' it fine!" Thomas whispered to the coals.

"Oh, ay, fine, zur—just *fine!*" said Dannie.

But Skipper Thomas knew that for a lie when Dannie had gone to bed: for he heard the floor creak overhead, and he knew the meaning of that; and he heard the window groan, and he knew the meaning of that. Long after Janet had put her knitting aside, long after Dannie should have been sound asleep in the little bed above—late, late in the night, when the last of the coals in the stove were turning grey, Skipper Thomas heard a soft step overhead and the lifting of the window.

"What's that?" Janet whispered.

"'Tis Dannie," Skipper Thomas groaned.

"Dannie!" said she.

"Dannie—'tis Dannie!" Thomas whimpered.

"Lard, Lard," he cried, "must I curse Thee for my son's sake afore I dies?"

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"Do he be sick, think you?"

"He've got up t' look at the weather, mum."

"But he've not to goa sailin' the morrow, have he?"

"'Tis the weather o' two days hence, woman, when he've t' goa back t' Boot Harbour in the punt. Dannie's bond slave to his fancy. Lard God," the old man groaned, putting his hands to his face, "my wee lad's dreadin' the weather o' two days hence!"

Skipper Thomas knew the meaning of that.

V

*Hold Thou me not back from the shelter o' harbour, O Lard,
lest the waters o' the Sea get me!*

It was a beat to harbour through spumy seas—to and fro on a staggering zigzag toward a deeper shadow in a low, far-off coast, lying black and wet in the fog: a flight from the frothy night behind to the still water and silence of harbour. The flare had gone out of the sky—the west was leaden and misty: night was fast driving the dusk in upon the wilderness. The wind was rising; it swept out from shore in long gusts—a wind let loose and gone mad: now tearing the crests from the waves and

A B E A T T ' H A R B O U R

flinging them broadcast; again, slipping like a whisper into the dark o' the sea. Zigzag, to and fro, through drift ice and breaking waves, heeling to the wind and smothered by the seas, went the Early Bird; she was labouring manfully to make the shelter of harbour.

Skipper Dan was at the wheel. Tom Tutt staggered aft and put his mouth close to the Skipper's ear.

"She can't make it!" he roared. "But an you heave her to, she'll ride out this blow."

The schooner fell over under a long blast of the gale. When she righted, Skipper Dan fixed Tutt with bloodshot, flaring eyes—a vacant stare. His eyes were sunk deep in the sockets; his teeth were set, the skin of his cheeks drawn tight, the colour gone from his face.

"Eh?" he roared.

"Heave her to, man!" Tutt cried. "She'll ride this blow out."

"The wind's risin'," Dan returned.

Tutt stamped his foot. "Ay, risin'," he screamed. "'Tis time t' take the sail off her."

"Risin' fast," the Skipper cried. "'Tis time t' make harbour. I'm wantin' t' get out o' this."

THE WAY OF THE SEA

"She'll never beat in."

Skipper Dan lifted one hand from the wheel. He pointed to that place where the harbour lay—the deeper shadow in a dark line of coast, far off in the mist.

"Harbour!" he shouted.

"But, man, she can't make it!"

A great sea broke over the bows and came curling down the decks. The schooner quivered, lurched, rose to the crest of the next wave.

"My God, man," screamed Tutt, "she'll stand noa moare!"

Skipper Dan looked again to the harbour tickle—a scared glance, cast swiftly from the open sea to the place where shelter was.

"I'll hold on with the sail I got," he muttered, his teeth hard set, "for I'm wantin' t' make harbour."

Came a furious gust; it heeled the schooner till her rail was buried in frothy water, which flashed hissing past—jammed her down, down, down: held her there, near on her beam-ends. She righted in a lull.

"For God's sake, reef her, Dan!" cried Tutt.

Skipper Dan spun the wheel to meet a combing sea head on. The schooner smothered her bows.

A B E A T T ' H A R B O U R

"I'll hold on with the sail I got," he gasped, "for I'm—in haste—t' make—harbour."

"You'll lose her—you'll lose her!"

They were about to take the other tack. Tutt ran forward to lend a hand with the jib sheets. The seas broke over her fore and aft while she hung in stays—smothered her, near swamped her; but she came to, at last, and ran off, with the water pouring over her lee rail.

"Oh, God," Skipper Dan groaned, "I'm wantin' sore t' make harbour!" The wind swept his cry off to sea, where there was no ear to hear. He looked up to the driving sky, and he said: "I isn't able t' stand much moare o' this, Lard. The wind an' the waves rage, an' I is troubled; the sea sets a trap with the night, an' I is afraid. The wind rises, gust upon gust, until my heart stands still; the waves o' the sea increase, wave after wave, an' noa man knoweth their purpose."

It was touch and go with the Early Bird. The gale was swirling yet more wildly in the dusk of roundabout. The coast was a thin shadow in the mist—a black streak, low lying, and fringed with frothy white. The night had crept close to the shoal off the harbour mouth—which may not be

THE WAY OF THE SEA

threaded in the dark. It was touch and go; so Tutt came aft again.

"Lard, Dan," he begged, "woan't you reef her down, now?"

Skipper Dan shook his head.

"She'll turn over, man! Woan't you leave us reef the for's'l?"

Dan hesitated. "Stand by t' cut the for's'l halliards!" he shouted to two of the crew. "But doan't you cut afore I gives the word."

Again the schooner went over, and hung trembling on her beam-ends. But the skipper would not sacrifice the sail to the peril of the moment.

"Cut away!" screamed Tutt.

"Noa, noa!" Dan roared.

Since Dan was a lad—since that night, long ago, when, snuggled close to his father in the dark, he looked forward to the life he must lead—he had measured the strength and cunning of the things he feared.

"Hell!" the clerk cried, in his throat, staring, the while, at the mounting water. "We're lost!"

But the schooner righted.

"I'll hold on," Dan muttered, "for I'm wantin' t' make harbour."

A B E A T T' H A R B O U R

To and fro on the zigzag went the Early Bird, labouring into the off-shore wind—heeling, reeling, smothered in foam: a race against the night, with the sea pulling at her. In the end—when the dark was thick—she slipped through the tickle to the harbour; and they dropped anchor in the lee of the great hills, where the water rippled, and no more than a flutter and moan of the gale without broke the peace of the place.

“Harbour!” Dannie Crew whispered, as the chain ran rattling through the hawse-pipe; he lifted his hands to the black sky, and, “Lard God,” he cried, “the anchor’s down! ’Tis harbour—’tis harbour!”

And, oh, ay, Skipper Dannie was gay enough when the fire crackled in the forecastle bogie—when the fire crackled and the kettle sang and the cook rattled his pots and pans! Oh, ay, Dannie Crew was merry enough when the coals began to glow and the yellow light of the forecastle lamp chased the shadows up the ladder to the night! Ay, while the fire roared and the lamp was alight and the ship lay in the shelter of the hills, Dan Crew was jolly

THE WAY OF THE SEA

enough. It was he who clapped old Sam Budgel on the back until his very bones rattled, he who rallied Tom Tutt on beatin' t' win'ard, he who told the tale of the Third Great Haul o' Seals, who sang the Song o' the Pirate Mate. For the wind and the spumy waves and the trap the sea had set with the night—and the fear of the clutch of death—were as though far off.

"Skipper, zur," said old Sam Budgel, at last, with a sour twitch of the lips, "you're makin' a wonderful lot o' noise."

The crew grinned.

"Oh, ay," Skipper Dan laughed, "for I'm in wonderful fine fettle the night."

The blow on the back had put the old man in an ill temper. Wider grew the grin of the crew—more expectant; for at such times the words of Sam Budgel cut deep, and are to be remembered.

"'Tis because he've brought the Early Bird t' harbour, I 'low," said he, appealing to the crew.

"I'm fair happy t' be out o' the gale, Sam," Dan admitted, quietly.

"An' you've saved your life, you thinks?"

"Ay," was the answer, gravely spoken. "I've

A B E A T T ' H A R B O U R

saved my body from the waves o' the sea—my soul from the hands o' death."

The grin faded from the faces of the crew.

"Hut!" Sam sneered.

The crew leaned forward to listen. The old man's sneer was ominous of some hard word to come.

"Say what you've t' say, Sam," said the skipper, "an' have done."

"'Tis but one gale," with a shrug.

There was silence in the forecastle. Skipper Dan stared at the old man: then came close to him, and laid a hand on his shoulder. There was dead silence, then.

"Say that again, Sam," said the skipper, hoarsely. "I—I—doan't know—yet—what you means. 'Tis but *one* gale, says you?"

"Ay; but one."

"'Tis a wonderful thought. But *one* gale weathered?"

"Ay; but one. You're safe from *it*; but 'tis not the last you'll have t' weather. You're in harbour now, lad, but you'll have t' put t' sea the morrow. 'Tis not the last gale that'll blow. They's all the

THE WAY OF THE SEA

fall gales o' this year, an' all the spring gales o' the next, an' all the fall gales t' follow; they's the spring gales o' the year after, an' the fall gales o' that season—ay, the fall an' spring gales o' all the years——”

“Stop!” Dan cried.

“The fall an' spring gales o' all the years——”

For the moment Dan was unmanned. “Doan't say noa moare, Sam!” he pleaded; then, “I've weathered but one moare gale, says you?”

“But one gale o' the gales o' many years.”

“I'm in harbour for but the night?”

“For but the night. When you is so old as me, lad, you'll know they's noa such thing as harbour.”

“I didn't know it afore,” Dan whispered, looking away, “but I knows it now. I wisht I didn't.”

“They's noa such thing as harbour!”

“Ay; they's noa such thing as harbour. I thought they was, but now I knows they isn't. They's noa such thing as harbour! I wisht—oh, I wisht—they was!”

Skipper Dan went on deck. For a long time they listened, in silence, to the fall of his restless feet overhead.

A B E A T T ' H A R B O U R

"He've lost *his* anchor, sure enough," said Tom Tutt.

Skipper Dan did not come again to the forecastle that night.

VI

In the first fall gale of that year, the Early Bird was caught off a lee shore near the Rocks o' Wrecked Ships. It is a rock-bound cove—in stormy weather all black and white, under low, grey skies: a wide place, open to the seas, high-cliffed; and the sea breaks upon heaps of jagged, black rocks, or leaps at the cliff, flinging spray into the mist that clings to the spruce-trees above. The wind came from the open—from the far, vast wastes of the northeast, which are forever strange and dark: it swept in-shore; there was no escape from the Cove o' Wrecked Ships. It was a great wind: not a fussy summer gale, black in a moment but soon breaking into sunshine and blue calm (a wind to be humoured and outwitted); it was a wind of gathered force, thick with frost, driving heavily, strong beyond the strength of schooners. The sea had lain restless

THE WAY OF THE SEA

under variable gales for five days. Then came the grim wind, now of fixed and sullen purpose to sweep those seas of ships; it gathered the waves together and drove them fuming in upon the Rocks o' Wrecked Ships. Off shore, between the breakers and the wilder open, the little Early Bird lay tossing, with anchors out to port and starboard. There was nothing to be done; the issue lay with the wind and the anchor chains.

The men in the forecastle counted their sins.

"Growin' warse!" Tom Tutt roared to the skipper.

They were forward by the windlass—with an eye on the chains; the skipper had stood there the night through. It was near dawn of the second day. The dark still lay thick in the west. Dead to leeward, the black rocks were taking form in the mist and spume. The seas, as they ran past to that place, clutched the ship and tugged at her mightily.

Skipper Dan nodded.

"She'll tear her nose out!" Tutt shouted, his left hand to his mouth.

The skipper got to windward to reply. He

A B E A T T ' H A R B O U R

shook his head—shook it again, and put his mouth close to Tutt's ear.

“Job Manuel—master builder!” he said.

The clerk's next words were caught up by the wind and flung against the cliffs to leeward. A wave broke over the bows. Tutt was taken unaware and near swept away. He made his handhold good again.

“Who forged the chains?” he gasped.

Skipper Dan stared into Tutt's eyes—then, of a sudden, straight out to sea: his glance did not return.

“Who forged un?” Tutt cried.

“Who did?” Dan muttered, blankly.

Tutt could no longer bear the mad confusion of wind and breaking waves—of spume and the flying dawn. He staggered back to the forecabin. On the ladder he paused to watch the sea breaking over the Rocks o' Wrecked Ships. Then he heard the answer to his question. It came with the wind.

“Who forged the chains?” Skipper Dan was crying. “Upon the first link and upon the last, upon the seventh and the seventieth, hang the lives o'

THE WAY OF THE SEA

seven men. Whose arm swung the hammer? Had the work o' the day a high place in the heart o' that man? Who forged the chains? In the red forges o' the south they were made—in a place far off an' hidden; an' the hands an' the hearts o' the smiths o' that coast are not known t' the men o' the north . . . O God, who forged the chains?"

A whim of the wind swept the rest away. Tom Tutt shook his fist at the breakers and black rocks.

"'Tis the Port o' Hell!" he screamed.

He went below and told the crew that the skipper was stark mad.

The port anchor chain parted at dusk—at a time when the last of the sullen evening light lingered over the inland wilderness: the black coast was fast melting with the darkening sky beyond; the breakers were turned to soft white clouds, hanging in the shadows under the cliff. The Early Bird began to drag on a straight course for the Rocks o' Wrecked Ships. It was, "Hands on deck! She's adrift!" and, "Stand by t' slip the starboard anchor! We'll beach her!" The crew tumbled up—blinded by the sudden darkness, breathless in the driving wind;

A B E A T T ' H A R B O U R

they stumbled forward to the windlass. Skipper Dan was a man—ready, sure, masterful: a new ring to his voice, a new light in his eye. There was a word or two of precise direction—no question, now, no whine of fear; then the skipper ran aft to the wheel. “Haul away!” came out of the dusk at the stern. The starboard anchor was slipped. Up went the main jib. The schooner rounded and ran away before the wind—bound for that point in the cliff where the trees grew low: skilfully helped over the rough way to her wreck.

The crew was gathered by the foremast, where, in awe, each watched the breakers grow large.

“Hark!” Tom Tutt exclaimed. “Sure, Skipper Dan’s singin’!”

They listened to the words the wind swept past—bending their heads, they listened.

“’Tis about a heart that faints!” said Tutt, turning in wonder.

“Ay,” old Sam added, “an’ a word o’ some wonderful fine harbour he’s bound to.”

“Mad!” the clerk cried. “The skipper’s stark mad!”

“‘Great hills,’ says he,” Sam went on, “‘give it

THE WAY OF THE SEA

shelter from the winds forever: nor do men any moare put out t' sea.' ”

The voice crying in the dark was obscured by the thunder of the surf—the hiss and crash and thud.

“ ‘The soul o’ man,’ says he,” the old man interpreted, “ ‘seeketh its rest,’ says he, ‘as the skipper of a little ship the lee of a hill in a gale.’ ”

The Early Bird was now near shore—flying straight for that break in the cliff where the trees grew lower than the truck of the foremast: she would strike there, if Skipper Dan kept true to his duty.

“Hold Thou me not now back from the long shelter o’ that place, O Lard,” was the last word they heard from the man at the wheel, “lest the waters o’ great shame cover me!”

That was all; prayer and outcry and the long scream of the wind were lost in the tumult of great seas breaking to froth on the rocks under the cliff—a confusion of noises, rising harshly from the seething shadows ahead, dazing the senses: cough and roar and shuddering thud. Skipper Dan was still at the wheel—helping the schooner over the waves; it needed a keen eye and a quiet hand, to

A B E A T T ' H A R B O U R

the end. When, at last, he gave her to the breaker, it was with unfaltering skill; and he knew—it was in a flash of suddy water, leaping high, and a thick, black mass, looming overhead—that she would strike as he had planned. She was caught, lifted, flung broadside at the cliff, dropped on the jagged rocks beneath. Then she careened, and lay pounding, with her maintopmast threshing the trees that grew low on the face of the cliff: a way of escape foreseen and provided. The wave following broke over the rail, fell on the deck and swept it clean; but the men of the crew had swung into the main rigging and were even then climbing like mad for the trees on the cliff: to which they escaped—Tom Tutt, the last, with a hand from old Sam Budgel, as the mast fell back and the schooner went to pieces.

“My God!” Tutt screamed, peering into the white hell below. “Where’s Skipper Dan?”

My God! where’s Skipper Dan? In harbour? It’s a blind beat into the wind—oh, ay, a heeling, reeling beat t’ harbour, through frothy seas and the flying dusk: a ship tossing in the grey confusion. Toil and strife and the haunting fear! The

THE WAY OF THE SEA

hands do the work of the day ; but the heart turns from the sullen rage of roundabout to the placid place in the mist beyond. I'm wantin' t' make harbour! Through the black tickle to the harbour. Lord God, the anchor's down! 'Tis harbour—'tis harbour! Sheltered waters—morning mists aglow—tinkling bells on the hills—blue noon and the drowsy shade—sinking sun and the glory of the cloud of gold—hymns wandering in the twilight shadows—night and the sleep o' night! My God, where's Skipper Dan? In harbour!

VII

In the cottage at Finger Cove, which lies beyond Mad Mull, on the road from Ragged Harbour to Sunday's Arm, Thomas Crew, an old punt fisherman, sat rocking before the kitchen fire ; and his head hung over his breast, and he was staring at the red coals in the stove. It was late in the fall of the year : a wild, wet gale from the nor'east was blowing ; it flung spray against the black window-panes, and ran howling past to the wilderness. In a lull of the gale, tick, tock ! tick, tock ! tick, tock !

A B E A T T ' H A R B O U R

went the little clock ; but the busy click, click, click ! of the knitting-needles had ceased. Aunt Janet Crew's hands were folded in her lap ; she, too, was staring at the red coals in the stove.

"He died brave," Skipper Thomas whispered. "They *says* he did!"

"Ay," she answered. "He was a brave lad—was our Dannie."

"'Twas kind o' the Lard t' take un—that way. They's something wrong with the world," the old man added, running his hand through his hair, "but I isn't sure just what."

Tick, tock ! went the clock. Tick, tock ! tick, tock ! . . .

THE FRUITS OF TOIL

Chapter X

THE FRUITS OF TOIL

NOW the wilderness, savage and remote, yields to the strength of men. A generation strips it of tree and rock, a generation tames it and tills it, a generation passes into the evening shadows as into rest in a garden, and thereafter the children of that place possess it in peace and plenty, through succeeding generations, without end, and shall to the end of the world. But the sea is tameless: as it was in the beginning, it is now, and shall ever be—mighty, savage, dread, infinitely treacherous and hateful, yielding only that which is wrested from it, snarling, raging, snatching lives, spoiling souls of their graces. The tiller of the soil sows in peace, and in a yellow, hazy peace he reaps; he passes his hand over a field, and, lo, in good season he gathers a harvest, for the earth rejoices to serve him. The deep is not thus subdued; the toiler of the sea—the Newfoundlander of the upper shore—is

THE WAY OF THE SEA

born to conflict, ceaseless and deadly, and, in the dawn of all the days, he puts forth anew to wage it, as his father did, and his father's father, and as his children must, and his children's children, to the last of them; nor from day to day can he foresee the issue, nor from season to season foretell the worth of the spoil, which is what chance allows. Thus laboriously, precariously, he slips through life: he follows hope through the toilsome years; and past summers are a black regret and bitterness to him, but summers to come are all rosy with new promise.

Long ago, when young Luke Dart, the Boot Bay trader, was ambitious for Shore patronage, he said to Solomon Stride, of Ragged Harbour, a punt fisherman: "Solomon, b'y, an you be will-in', I'll trust you with twine for a cod-trap. An you trade with me, b'y, I'll trade with you, come good times or bad." Solomon was young and lusty, a mighty youth in bone and seasoned muscle, lunged like a blast furnace, courageous and finely sanguine. Said he: "An you trust me with twine for a trap, skipper, I'll deal fair by you,

THE FRUITS OF TOIL

come good times or bad. I'll pay for un, skipper, with the first fish I cotches." Said Luke Dart: "When I trust, b'y, I trust. You pays for un when you can." It was a compact, so, at the end of the season, Solomon builded a cottage under the Man-o'-War, Broad Cove way, and married a maid of the place. In five months of that winter he made the trap, every net of it, leader and all, with his own hands, that he might know that the work was good, to the last knot and splice. In the spring, he put up the stage and the flake, and made the skiff; which done, he waited for a sign of fish. When the tempered days came, he hung the net on the horse, where it could be seen from the threshold of the cottage. In the evenings he sat with Priscilla on the bench at the door, and dreamed great dreams, while the red sun went down in the sea, and the shadows crept out of the wilderness.

"Woman, dear," said this young Solomon Stride, with a slap of his great thigh, "'twill be a gran' season for fish this year."

"Sure, b'y," said Priscilla, tenderly; "'twill be a gran' season for fish."

THE WAY OF THE SEA

“Ay,” Solomon sighed, “’twill that — this year.”

The gloaming shadows gathered over the harbour water, and hung, sullenly, between the great rocks, rising all roundabout.

“’Tis handy t’ three hundred an’ fifty dollars I owes Luke Dart for the twine,” mused Solomon.

“’Tis a hape o’ money t’ owe,” said Priscilla.

“Hut!” growled Solomon, deep in his chest.
“’Tis like nothin’.”

“’Tis not much,” said Priscilla, smiling, “when you has a trap.”

Dusk and a clammy mist chased the glory from the hills; the rocks turned black, and a wind, black and cold, swept out of the wilderness and ran to sea.

“Us’ll pay un all up this year,” said Solomon.
“Oh,” he added, loftily, “’twill be easy. ’Tis t’ be a gran’ season!”

“Sure!” said she, echoing his confidence.

Night filled the cloudy heavens overhead. It drove the flush of pink in upon the sun, and, following fast and overwhelmingly, thrust the flaring

THE FRUITS OF TOIL

red and gold over the rim of the sea; and it was dark.

“Us’ll pay un for a trap, dear,” chuckled Solomon, “an’ have enough left over t’ buy a——”

“Oh,” she cried, with an ecstatic gasp, “a sewin’ machane!”

“Iss,” he roared. “Sure, girl!”

But, in the beginning of that season, when the first fish ran in for the caplin and the nets were set out, the ice was still hanging off shore, drifting vagrantly with the wind; and there came a gale in the night, springing from the northeast—a great, vicious wind, which gathered the ice in a pack and drove it swiftly in upon the land. Solomon Stride put off in a punt, in a sea tossing and white, to loose the trap from its moorings. Three times, while the pack swept nearer, crunching and horribly groaning, as though lashed to cruel speed by the gale, the wind beat him back through the tickle; and, upon the fourth essay, when his strength was breaking, the ice ran over the place where the trap was, and chased the punt into the harbour, frothing upon its flank. When, three days thereafter, a west wind carried the ice

THE WAY OF THE SEA

to sea, Solomon dragged the trap from the bottom. Great holes were bruised in the nets, head rope and span line were ground to pulp, the anchors were lost. Thirty-seven days and nights it took to make the nets whole again, and in that time the great spring run of cod passed by. So, in the next spring, Solomon was deeper in the debt of sympathetic Luke Dart—for the new twine and for the winter's food he had eaten; but, of an evening, when he sat on the bench with Priscilla, he looked through the gloaming shadows gathered over the harbour water and hanging between the great rocks, to the golden summer approaching, and dreamed gloriously of the fish he would catch in his trap.

“Priscilla, dear,” said Solomon Stride, slapping his iron thigh, “they be a fine sign o’ fish down the coast. ’Twill be a gran’ season, I’m thinkin’.”

“Sure, b’y,” Priscilla agreed; “’twill be a gran’ cotch o’ fish you’ll have this year.”

Dusk and the mist touched the hills, and, in the dreamful silence, their glory faded; the rocks turned black, and the wind from the wilderness ruffled the water beyond the flake.

THE FRUITS OF TOIL

“Us’ll pay Luke Dart this year, I tells you,” said Solomon, like a boastful boy. “Us’ll pay un twice over.”

“’Twill be fine t’ have the machane,” said she, with shining eyes.

“An’ the calico t’ use un on,” said he.

And so, while the night spread overhead, these two simple folk feasted upon all the sweets of life; and all that they desired they possessed, as fast as fancy could form wishes, just as though the bench were a bit of magic furniture, to bring dreams true—until the night, advancing, thrust the red and gold of the sunset clouds over the rim of the sea, and it was dark.

“Leave us goa in,” said Priscilla.

“This year,” said Solomon, rising, “I be goain’ t’ cotch three hundred quintals o’ fish. Sure, I be—this year.”

“’Twill be fine,” said she.

It chanced in that year that the fish failed utterly; hence, in the winter following, Ragged Harbour fell upon days of distress; and three old women and one old man starved to death—and five children, of whom one was the infant son of

THE WAY OF THE SEA

Solomon Stride. Neither in that season, nor in any one of the thirteen years coming after, did this man catch three hundred quintals of cod in his trap. In pure might of body—in plenitude and quality of strength—in the full, eager power of brawn—he was great as the men of any time, a towering glory to the whole race, here hidden; but he could not catch three hundred quintals of cod. In spirit—in patience, hope, courage, and the fine will for toil—he was great; but, good season or bad, he could not catch three hundred quintals of cod. He met night, cold, fog, wind, and the fury of waves, in their craft, in their swift assault, in their slow, crushing descent; but all the cod he could wrest from the sea, being given into the hands of Luke Dart, an honest man, yielded only sufficient provision for food and clothing for himself and Priscilla—only enough to keep their bodies warm and still the crying of their stomachs. Thus, while the nets of the trap rotted, and Solomon came near to middle age, the debt swung from seven hundred dollars to seven, and back to seventy-three, which it was on an evening in spring, when he sat with Priscilla on the sunken bench at the

THE FRUITS OF TOIL

door, and dreamed great dreams, as he watched the shadows gather over the harbour water and sullenly hang between the great rocks, rising all roundabout.

"I wonder, b'y," said Priscilla, "if 'twill be a good season—this year."

"Oh, sure!" exclaimed Solomon. "Sure!"

"D'ye think it, b'y?" wistfully.

"Woman," said he, impressively, "us'll cotch a hape o' fish in the trap this year. They be millions o' fish t' the say," he went on excitedly; "millions o' fish t' the say. They be there, woman. 'Tis oan'y for us t' take un out. I be goain' t' wark hard this year."

"You be a great warker, Solomon," said she; "my, but you be!"

Priscilla smiled, and Solomon smiled; and it was as though all the labour and peril of the season were past, and the stage were full to the roof with salt cod. In the happiness of this dream they smiled again, and turned their eyes to the hills, from which the glory of purple and yellow was departing to make way for the misty dusk.

"Skipper Luke Dart says t' me," said Solo-

THE WAY OF THE SEA

mon, "that 'tis the luxuries that keeps folk poor."

Priscilla said nothing at all.

"They be nine dollars agin me in seven years for crame o' tartar," said Solomon. "Think o' that!"

"My," said she, "but 'tis a lot! But we be used to un now, Solomon, an' we can't get along without un."

"Sure," said he, "'tis good we're not poor like some folk."

Night drove the flush of pink in upon the sun and followed the red and gold of the horizon over the rim of the sea.

"'Tis growin' cold," said she.

"Leave us goa in," said he.

In thirty years after that time, Solomon Stride put to sea ten thousand times. Ten thousand times he passed through the tickle rocks to the free, heaving deep for salmon and cod, thereto compelled by the inland waste, which contributes nothing to the sustenance of the men of that coast. Hunger, lurking in the shadows of days to come, inexorably drove him into the chances of the con-

THE FRUITS OF TOIL

flict. Perforce he matched himself ten thousand times against the restless might of the sea, immeasurable and unrestrained, surviving the gamut of its moods because he was great in strength, fearlessness, and cunning. He weathered four hundred gales, from the grey gusts which come down between Quid Nunc and the Man-o'-War, leaping upon the fleet, to the summer tempests, swift and black, and the first blizzards of winter. He was wrecked off the Mull, off the Three Poor Sisters, on the Pancake Rock, and again off the Mull. Seven times he was swept to sea by the off-shore wind. Eighteen times he was frozen to the seat of his punt; and of these, eight times his feet were frozen, and thrice his festered right hand. All this he suffered, and more, of which I may set down six separate periods of starvation, in which thirty-eight men, women, and children died—all this, with all the toil, cold, despair, loneliness, hunger, peril, and disappointment therein contained. And so he came down to old age—with a bent back, shrunken arms, and filmy eyes—old Solomon Stride, now prey for the young sea. But, of an evening in spring, he sat with Priscilla on

THE WAY OF THE SEA

the sunken bench at the door, and talked hopefully of the fish he would catch from his punt.

“Priscilla, dear,” said he, rubbing his hand over his weazened thigh, “I be thinkin’ us punt fishermen’ll have a——”

Priscilla was not attending; she was looking into the shadows above the harbour water, dreaming deeply of a mystery of the Book, which had long puzzled her; so, in silence, Solomon, too, watched the shadows rise and sullenly hang between the great rocks.

“Solomon, b’y,” she whispered, “I wonder what the seven thunders uttered.”

“’Tis quare, that—what the seven thunders uttered,” said Solomon. “My, woman, but ’tis!”

“‘An’ he set his right foot upon the sea,’” she repeated, staring over the greying water to the clouds which flamed gloriously at the edge of the world, “‘an’ his left foot on the earth——’”

“‘An’ cried with a loud voice,’” said he, whispering in awe, “‘as when a lion roareth; an’ when he had cried, *seven thunders uttered their voices.*’”

“‘Seven thunders uttered their voices.’” said she; “‘an’ when the seven thunders had uttered

THE FRUITS OF TOIL

their voices, I was about to write, an' I heard a voice from heaven sayin' unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, an' write them not.' " *

The wind from the wilderness, cold and black, covered the hills with mist; the dusk fell, and the glory faded from the heights.

" Oh, Solomon," she said, clasping her hands, " I wonder what the seven thunders uttered! Think you, b'y, 'twas the kind o' sins that can't be forgiven? "

" 'Tis the seven mysteries! "

" I wonder what they be," said she.

" Sh-h-h, dear," he said, patting her grey head; " thinkin' on they things'll capsize you an you don't look out."

The night had driven all the colour from the sky; it had descended upon the red and gold of the cloudy west, and covered them. It was cold and dark.

" ' An' seven thunders uttered their voices,' " she said, dreamily.

" Sh-h-h, dear!" said he. " Leave us goa in."

* The Revelation of St. John the Divine, chap. x., 2-4.

THE WAY OF THE SEA

Twenty-one years longer old Solomon Stride fished out of Ragged Harbour. He put to sea five thousand times more, weathered two hundred more gales, survived five more famines—all in the toil for salmon and cod. He was a punt fisherman again, was old Solomon; for the nets of the trap had rotted, had been renewed six times, strand by strand, and had rotted at last beyond repair. What with the weather he dared not pit his failing strength against, the return of fish to Luke Dart fell off from year to year; but, as Solomon said to Luke, “livin’ expenses kep’ up wonderful,” notwithstanding.

“I be so used t’ luxuries,” he went on, running his hand through his long grey hair, “that ’twould be hard t’ come down t’ common livin’. Sure, ’tis sugar I wants t’ me tea—not black-strap. ’Tis what I l’arned,” he added, proudly, “when I were a trap fisherman.”

“’Tis all right, Solomon,” said Luke. “Many’s the quintal o’ fish you traded with me.”

“Sure,” Solomon chuckled; “’twould take a year t’ count un.”

In course of time it came to the end of Solomon’s

THE FRUITS OF TOIL

last season—those days of it when, as the folk of the coast say, the sea is hungry for lives—and the man was eighty-one years old, and the debt to Luke Dart had crept up to \$230.80. The off-shore wind, rising suddenly, with a blizzard in its train, caught him alone on the Grappling Hook grounds. He was old, very old—old and feeble and dull: the cold numbed him; the snow blinded him; the wind made sport of the strength of his arms. He was carried out to sea, rowing doggedly, thinking all the time that he was drawing near the harbour tickle; for it did not occur to him then that the last of eight hundred gales could be too great for him. He was carried out from the sea, where the strength of his youth had been spent, to the Deep, which had been a mystery to him all his days. That night he passed on a pan of ice, where he burned his boat, splinter by splinter, to keep warm. At dawn he lay down to die. The snow ceased, the wind changed; the ice was carried to Ragged Harbour. Eleazar Manuel spied the body of Solomon from the lookout, and put out and brought him in—revived him and took him home to Priscilla. Through the winter the

THE WAY OF THE SEA

old man doddered about the harbour, dying of consumption. When the tempered days came—the days of balmy sunshine and cold evening winds—he came quickly to the pass of glittering visions, which, for such as die of the lung trouble, come at the end of life.

In the spring, when the *Lucky Star*, three days out from Boot Bay, put into Ragged Harbour to trade for the first catch, old Skipper Luke Dart was aboard, making his last voyage to the Shore; for he was very old, and longed once more to see the rocks of all that coast before he made ready to die. When he came ashore, Eleazar Manuel told him that Solomon Stride lay dying at home; so the skipper went to the cottage under the Man-o'-War to say good-bye to his old customer and friend—and there found him, propped up in bed, staring at the sea.

“Skipper Luke,” Solomon quavered, in deep excitement, “be you just come in, b’y?”

“Iss—but an hour gone.”

“What be the big craft hangin’ off shoare? Eh—what be she, b’y?”

THE FRUITS OF TOIL

There had been no craft in sight when the *Lucky Star* beat in. "Were she a fore-an'-after, Solomon?" said Luke, evasively.

"Sure, noa, b'y!" cried Solomon. "She were a square-rigged craft, with all sail set—a great, gran' craft—a quare craft, b'y—like she were made o' glass, canvas an' hull an' all; an' she had shinin' ropes, an' she were shinin' all over. Sure, they be a star t' the tip o' her bowsprit, b'y, an' a star t' the peak o' her mainmast—seven stars they be, in all. Oh, she were a gran' sight!"

"Hem-m!" said Luke, stroking his beard. "She've not come in yet."

"A gran' craft!" said Solomon.

"'Tis accordin'," said Luke, "t' whether you be sot on oak bottoms or glass ones."

"She were bound down north t' the Labrador," Solomon went on quickly, "an' when she made the Grapplin' Hook grounds she come about an' headed for the tickle, with her sails squared. Sure she ran right over the Pancake, b'y, like he weren't there at all, an'—How's the wind, b'y?"

"Dead off shore from the tickle."

Solomon stared at Luke. "She were comin'

THE WAY OF THE SEA

straight in agin the wind," he said, hoarsely. "Maybe, skipper," he went on, with a little laugh, "she do be the ship for souls. They be many things strong men knows nothin' about. What think you?"

"Ay—maybe; maybe she be."

"Maybe—maybe—she do be invisible t' mortal eyes. Maybe, skipper, you hasn't seed her; maybe 'tis that my eyes do be opened t' such sights. Maybe she've turned in—for me."

The men turned their faces to the window again, and gazed long and intently at the sea, which a storm cloud had turned black. Solomon dozed for a moment, and when he awoke, Luke Dart was still staring dreamily out to sea.

"Skipper Luke," said Solomon, with a smile as of one in an enviable situation, "'tis fine t' have nothin' agin you on the books when you comes t' die."

"Sure, b'y," said Luke, hesitating not at all, though he knew to a cent what was on the books against Solomon's name, "'tis fine t' be free o' debt."

"Ah," said Solomon, the smile broadening glo-

THE FRUITS OF TOIL

riously, "'tis fine, I tells you! 'Twas the three hundred quintal I cotched last season that paid un all up. 'Twas a gran' cotch—last year. Ah," he sighed, "'twas a gran' cotch o' fish."

"Iss—you be free o' debt now, b'y."

"What be the balance t' my credit, skipper? Sure I forget."

"Hem-m," the skipper coughed, pausing to form a guess which might be within Solomon's dream; then he ventured: "Fifty dollars?"

"Iss," said Solomon, "fifty an' moare, skipper. Sure, you has forgot the eighty cents."

"Fifty-eighty," said the skipper, positively. "'Tis that. I call un t' mind now. 'Tis fifty-eighty—iss, sure. Did you get a receipt for un, Solomon?"

"I doan't mind me now."

"Um-m-m—well," said the skipper, "I'll send un t' the woman the night—an order on the *Lucky Star*."

"Fifty-eighty for the woman!" said Solomon. "'Twill kape her off the Gov'ment for three years, an she be savin.' 'Tis fine—that!"

When the skipper had gone, Priscilla crept in,

THE WAY OF THE SEA

and sat at the head of the bed, holding Solomon's hand; and they were silent for a long time, while the evening approached.

"I be goain' t' die the night, dear," said Solomon at last.

"Iss, b'y," she answered; "you be goain' t' die."

Solomon was feverish now; and, thereafter, when he talked, his utterance was thick and fast.

"'Tis not hard," said Solomon. "Sh-h-h," he whispered, as though about to impart a secret. "The ship that's hangin' off shoare, waitin' for me soul, do be a fine craft—with shinin' canvas an' ropes. Sh-h! She do be 'tother side o' Mad Mull now—waitin'."

Priscilla trembled, for Solomon had come to the time of visions—when the words of the dying are the words of prophets, and contain revelations. What of the utterings of the seven thunders?

"Sure the Lard he've blessed us, Priscilla," said Solomon, rational again. "Goodness an' marcy has followed us all the days o' our lives. Our cup runneth over."

THE FRUITS OF TOIL

“Praise the Lard,” said Priscilla.

“Sure,” Solomon went on, smiling like a little child, “we’ve had but eleven famines, an’ we’ve had the means o’ grace pretty reg’lar, which is what they hasn’t t’ Round ’Arbour. We’ve had one little baby for a little while. Iss—one de-ear little baby, Priscilla; an’ there’s them that’s had none o’ their own, at all. Sure we’ve had enough t’ eat when they wasn’t a famine—an’ bakin’ powder, an’ raisins, an’ all they things, an’ sugar, an’ rale good tea. An’ you had a merino dress, an’ I had a suit o’ rale tweed—come straight from England. We hasn’t seed a railroad train, dear, but we’ve seed a steamer, an’ we’ve heard tell o’ the quare things they be t’ St. Johns. Ah, the Lard he’ve favoured us above our deserts: He’ve been good t’ us, Priscilla. But, oh, you hasn’t had the sewin’ machane, an’ you hasn’t had the peach-stone t’ plant in the garden. ’Tis my fault, dear—’tis not the Lard’s. I should ’a’ got you the peach-stone from St. Johns, you did want un so much—oh, so much! ’Tis that I be sorry for, now, dear; but ’tis all over, an’ I can’t help it. It wouldn’t ’a’ growed anyway, I know it wouldn’t;

THE WAY OF THE SEA

but you thought it would, an' I wisht I'd got un for you."

"'Tis nothin', Solomon," she sobbed. "Sure, I was joakin' all the time. 'Twouldn't 'a' growed."

"Ah," he cried, radiant, "was you joakin'?"

"Sure," she said.

"We've not been poor, Priscilla," said he, continuing, "an' they be many folk that's poor. I be past me labour now," he went on, talking with rising effort, for it was at the sinking of the sun, "an' 'tis time for me t' die. 'Tis time—for I be past me labour."

Priscilla held his hand a long time after that—a long, silent time, in which the soul of the man struggled to release itself, until it was held but by a thread.

"Solomon!"

The old man seemed not to hear.

"Solomon, b'y!" she cried.

"Iss?" faintly.

She leaned over him to whisper in his ear, "Does you see the gates o' heaven?" she said.

"Oh, does you?"

"Sure, dear; heaven do be——"

THE FRUITS OF TOIL

Solomon had not strength enough to complete the sentence.

“B’y! B’y!”

He opened his eyes and turned them to her face. There was the gleam of a tender smile in them.

“The seven thunders,” she said. “The utterin’s of the seven thunders—what was they, b’y?”

“‘An’ the seven thunders uttered their voices,’” he mumbled, “‘an’——’”

She waited, rigid, listening, to hear the rest; but no words came to her ears.

“Does you hear me, b’y?” she said.

“‘An’ seven—thunders—uttered their voices,’” he gasped, “‘an’ the seven thunders—said—said——’”

The light failed; all the light and golden glory went out of the sky, for the first cloud of a tempest had curtained the sun.

“‘An’ said——’” she prompted.

“‘An’ uttered—an’ said—an’ said——’”

“Oh, what?” she moaned.

Now, in that night, when the body of old Solomon Stride, a worn-out hulk, aged and wrecked

THE WAY OF THE SEA

in the toil of the deep, fell into the hands of Death, the sea, like a lusty youth, raged furiously in those parts. The ribs of many schooners, slimy and rotten, and the white bones of men in the off-shore depths, know of its strength in that hour—of its black, hard wrath, in gust and wave and breaker. Eternal in might and malignance is the sea! It groweth not old with the men who toil from its coasts. Generation upon the heels of generation, infinitely arising, go forth in hope against it, continuing for a space, and returning spent to the dust. They age and crumble and vanish, each in its turn, and the wretchedness of the first is the wretchedness of the last. Ay, the sea has measured the strength of the dust in old graves, and, in this day, contends with the sons of dust, whose sons will follow to the fight for an hundred generations, and thereafter, until harvests may be gathered from rocks. As it is written, the life of a man is a shadow, swiftly passing, and the days of his strength are less; but the sea shall endure in the might of youth to the wreck of the world.

THE END

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